RADIO BOYS UNDER THE SEA

J. W. DUFFIELD

Leo T. Mitchell

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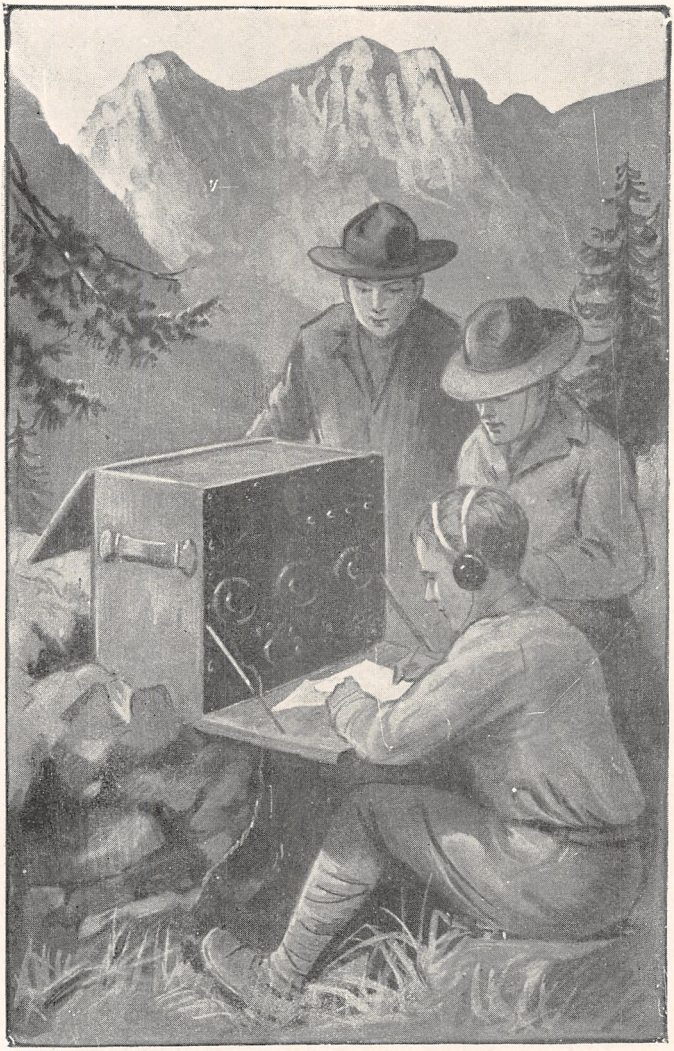
From Mama.



The Volcano Wakes

RADIO BOYS UNDER THE SEA

or,

The Hunt for Sunken Treasure

BY

J. W. DUFFIELD

M. A. DONOHUE & COMPANY

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THE

RADIO BOYS SERIES

RADIO BOYS IN THE SECRET SERVICE; or, Cast Away on an Iceberg.

RADIO BOYS IN THE FLYING SERVICE; or, Held For Ransom by Mexican Bandits.

RADIO BOYS IN THE THOUSAND ISLANDS; or, The Yankee-Canadian Wireless Trail.

RADIO BOYS UNDER THE SEA; or, The Hunt for Sunken Treasure.

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CHAPTER I

A Daring Leap

Down the road came plunging a runaway horse, his eyes blazing and his mouth flecked with foam.

In the light buggy that rocked and bounced behind him, threatening at any moment to overturn, stood a young man, sawing at the reins with all his strength. But though he was stalwart and vigorous, his strength availed nothing against the power of the maddened brute.

The man's eyes glanced from side to side, as though he were planning to jump. But at the fearful rate at which he was going, a leap would almost certainly have meant broken bones or a broken neck. He seemed to abandon the thought, and put the last remnant of his overtaxed strength in one more frantic tug at the reins.

A little way up the road, coming in his direction, were three young men. They had evidently been on a fishing excursion, as was attested by their rods and a big string of finny trophies. They were laughing and chaffing each other, and evidently on the best of terms with themselves and with life.

The thunder of approaching hoofs made itself heard, and they looked at each other questioningly.

"That fellow seems to be in a hurry," remarked Phil Strong.

"He sure does," returned Dick Weston. "Mazeppa or Paul Revere had nothing on him."

"Just burning up the road and breaking all speed laws," commented Tom Hadley, the third of the trio.

They turned a bend in the road just then, and broke into exclamations of alarm, as they saw the horse tearing toward them.

"The man will be killed," shouted Tom, as they instinctively jumped to the side of the road, which at this point was comparatively narrow, bordered on one side by trees and on the other by underbrush, back of which a little brook purled along.

On came the frenzied brute, yielding not a particle to the strain on the reins.

Just as he came within ten feet of the group, Phil stiffened himself for a spring. The next instant he had launched himself in the air at the horse's bridle. His aim was good, and his right hand clenched the leather while his left gripped the mane.

He had leaped in the direction the horse was going, and this to some extent lessened the force of the shock. All the same it was terrific, and

his muscles strained taut until it seemed as though they would burst. He held on however with a grip of iron, swinging himself up so as to escape the lashing hoofs and at the same time making the animal bear his whole weight.

The horse plunged wildly, shaking his head to get rid of his burden, but Phil held on with grim determination. His left hand slid from the mane down over the horse's nostrils which he compressed with all his strength.

Choking for breath the panic stricken animal reared and threw himself to one side, at the same time overturning the buggy. The driver was thrown out, striking on his head, while the horse was brought to his knees.

All this had happened in a few seconds. Paralyzed for a moment by the lightning quickness of Phil's action, Dick and Tom had quickly grasped the situation and rushed to his aid. Scarcely had the horse gone down than both were at the side of their comrade, helping him to hold down the frightened animal, who was making desperate efforts to get his feet.

They held him long enough for him to know that he had met his masters. Then they hastily unbuckled his harness and as the horse scrambled to his feet, Tom led him to a tree and tied him fast, while Phil and Dick hurried to the side of the injured driver, who still lay there limp and unconscious.

They were experts at first aid, and were greatly relieved as they ran their hands over him to find that no bones were broken. Blood was flowing from a gash in his head and running down over his face.

"Let's get him to the brook and bathe his head and face," suggested Phil, who was still panting from the effects of his tussle.

"Lucky if his skull isn't fractured," remarked Dick, as he lent a hand, seconded by Tom, who had by this time secured the horse and come to the help of his comrades.

Together they lifted the man and bore him through the underbrush to the bank of the brook. There they laid him down, and while one of them rubbed the wrists and hands, the others washed his head and face and dashed cold water on him in copious quantities. Phil carefully washed out the gash on the head into which the dust and grit of the road had been rubbed, and stripping enough linen from the sleeve of his shirt to make a bandage, carefully bound up the wound.

Before long the result of their administrations became apparent. There was a fluttering of the eyelids, and soon the man opened his eyes and looked wonderingly around. His glance fell on the boys, who were watching him anxiously.

He tried to speak, but his voice was thick and the words came with difficulty. Phil stopped him with a reassuring gesture.

"Don't try to talk yet, old man," he said. "You've had a nasty tumble but there are no bones broken and you'll be all right when you've rested up a little. Just take it easy for a few minutes and give your head a chance to clear."

The injured man relaxed and lay for a little while with his eyes closed, collecting his strength. And now for the first time the boys had a chance to take a good look at him.

He was a tall muscular man of athletic build, lean as a greyhound and with not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon him. His face was bronzed as that of an Indian and spoke of a life spent largely in the open. There was a smartness in the set of his shoulders that suggested military training. His nose was straight and his jaw firm. There were quizzical lines about his mouth that indicated the possession of a sense of humor. Altogether it was a likable face, and the boys as they watched him mentally classed him as a "regular fellow."

This impression was deepened when the man again opened his eyes. They were no longer clouded but clear and penetrating, eyes that looked directly at one, eyes that indicated a frank and straightforward character.

"I guess I've about got this thing straight now," the man remarked with a faint smile, as he raised himself on one elbow. "For a little while my head was buzzing like a flywheel. But

I remember now trying to hold the horse in and one of you young fellows flinging yourself at the brute's head."

His eyes traveled over the boys and rested on Phil.

"You're the one that did it," he said.

"Oh," replied Phil deprecatingly, I just happened to be the nearest when the horse came tearing along."

"It was a mighty plucky thing to do, I'll tell the world," said the stranger with gratitude and admiration in his voice. "There isn't one fellow in a thousand that would have taken the chance. It was a gamble with death, all right. I can't thank you enough. You probably saved my life."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Phil, throwing the matter off lightly. "You might have stopped him yourself after a while. He couldn't have run on forever. But how are you feeling now? Arms and legs all right?"

"Sore as the mischief but nothing broken," was the reply, as he moved them about. "I see my head was cut," he went on, as he raised his hand to the bandage.

"Rather deep cut," remarked Dick, "but nothing to worry about as long as the skull wasn't fractured."

"Oh, that skull has had many a hard knock in its time," the man said with a smile. "I guess

it was pretty thick to begin with and it's been toughened by what's happened to it since."

He raised himself to a sitting position and the boys helped to settle him comfortably with his back to a tree.

"I'm afraid I'm taking up your time and interfering with your plans," he said apologetically, as he glanced from one to the other.

"Not a bit of it," Phil hastened to reassure him. "We'd just been on a fishing trip and were on our way home. We've got all the time there is, and we're going to stick around until we see you safe to your home or hotel or wherever it is you want to go."

"That's mighty good of you," said the stranger gratefully. "I was figuring on staying at Castleton over night."

"That's where we hail from," replied Phil, "and as soon as you've rested a bit more we'll harness up the horse and drive you over, I guess he's had his fill of running away."

"The old pirate was sure full of ambition," laughed Tom. "He tore along—"

He stopped suddenly, for at the word "pirate" the stranger had straightened up like a flash and clapped his hand convulsively to his breast.

CHAPTER II

By Land and Sea

The sudden movement of the stranger rather startled the boys and piqued their curiosity. They looked at him and at each other inquiringly.

The man thrust his hand in the breast pocket of his coat and felt for something. That he had found it was evident from the look of profound relief that came into his face.

"Think you had lost your pocketbook in your tumble?" asked Phil with a smile.

"It wasn't money I was thinking of," was the reply. "Something that one of you said reminded me of some valuable papers that I had stowed away and that I wouldn't lose for a good deal. But they're just where I put them.

"My introduction to you young fellows was rather sudden," he went on, with a grin that displayed two rows of strong even teeth, "and this is about the first chance I've had to tell you what my name is and where I hail from. My name's Jack Benton, and I am, or was up to about three weeks ago, a member of the United States Marine Corps."

The boys acknowledged the introduction and gave him their names in return.

"So you're a Marine," remarked Phil with great interest. "That's a branch of the service that has always appealed to me more than any other. There's lots of adventure and you go everywhere and see everything."

"That's putting it pretty strong," laughed Benton, "but you're not so far out of the way at that. I've been in the service for about eight years, and there's scarcely a port of the world that I haven't been in at some time or other. I've seen all sorts of people and been mixed up in all kinds of adventures. There's plenty of hard work, but take it from me there's very little monotony in the life of a marine. The soldiers' work is on the land. The sailors' is on the sea. But the marines do their work on both land and sea."

"The Marine Corps did great work in the war." said Tom admiringly.

"They weren't so bad," replied Benton modestly. "People say they did pretty good work at Chateau-Thierry. and they weren't exactly absent when Belleau Wood was swept clear of the enemy. But then all our American boys did well in every branch of the service. Since the war things haven't been quite so lively with the marines, though we haven't had much chance to get rusty down in San Domingo. That's where

I've been for the last two years, and it was there that my term of service expired about three weeks ago. It's only about a week since I landed in New York."

"You seem so fond of the service that after a little vacation I suppose you'll re-enlist," observed Dick.

Benton hesitated, and almost unconsciously his hand again rested on his breast pocket.

"I may and I may not," he said slowly and with a touch of embarrassment. "The service, as I said, is full of adventure, and adventure is the breath of life to me. But just at present I'm planning an adventure on my own hook, the biggest one of my life—so big in fact that if I told you about it you might think I was crazy. I—I—"

And while with the keenest interest they stand listening for the expected disclosure, it may be well for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series to tell more fully who the boys were and what had been their adventures up to the time this story opens.

Phil Strong was the son of the leading physician in Castleton, a thriving manufacturing town in the Middle West. Phil had been born and brought up there, and was a general favorite, especially with the young fellows of his own age. He was now in his ninteenth year, stalwart, six feet tall and as straight as an arrow.

He was of fair complexion, brown-haired, and had merry blue eyes that could gleam with laughter or grow hard and cold as steel at anything or anyone that aroused his indigation. He was a leader in athletic sports and a tower of strength on his baseball nine and football eleven. He was straightforward, fearless and truthful, a steadfast friend and a formidable enemy.

Dick Weston, his closest friend, was the son of the cashier of the Castleton bank. He was of about the same age as Phil, and from their earliest boyhood they had been the closest of chums. Dick was impulsive and oftener needed the brake than the spur. He had less initiative than Phil, but could always be depended on to back his friend to the limit. In any crisis requiring quick thinking, Phil acted like lightning, but Dick was usually a pretty close second.

Tom Hadley hailed from Chicago, which he believed to be the only town on earth—a conviction he was always ready to assert and maintain. He was of a different type physically from the others, being rotund and stocky, while they were tall and athletic. He was full of jokes and fun, and nobody could be long depressed when Tom was one of the party.

Another friend of all three was Steve Elwood, who at the time happened to be in New York, his native city. He felt about this very much as Tom did about Chicago, and arguments

flew thick and fast when they got together. Steve was freckle-faced and red-headed, and had the hair-trigger temper that often goes with that combination. Like Kipling's Fuzzy-Wuzzy, he was full of "'ot sand and ginger," and it was advisable to give him a clear track when once he got started. With it all, he was frank and generous, and devotedly attached to the three friends, with whom he had shared many perils.

A special link that drew the boys still closer together was their common interest in radio. That wonderful new science found no more fervent devotees than they. Almost all their spare moments were spent in increasing their knowledge of its countless marvels, and they had become expert in both receiving and sending. So absorbed did they become that they had gained the name of the "Radio Boys," and soon it became a matter of course for Castleton folk to refer to them in that way when they were mentioned together. They saw the possibilities of the science, and worked at it not merely as a pastime, but because they had about decided to make it their lifelong profession.

The boys were red-blooded, all-alive young Americans and full of love for adventure. How that zest led them into many perils; how by a curious combination of circumstances they found themselves embarked on the hazardous work of the Secret Service; how their work led them into

the Everglades of Florida, where they encountered danger from beasts and reptiles and still more deadly criminals; how often they came within a hair's breadth of death and yet finally came out triumphant—these things are told in the first volume of this series, entitled: "The Radio Boys in the Secret Service; or Running Down the Counterfeiters."

Shortly after their return, the bank at Castleton was the victim of a daring holdup. Fifty thousand dollars were stolen and Dick's father, the cashier, was wounded. It was learned that "Muggs" Murray, the leader of the gang, had been seen in Texas. About the same time the Radio Boys, who were expert aviators, had an invitation to enter the flying service in connection with the Texas Rangers, who were patroling the troubled Mexican border. The opportunity for more adventure, combined with the chance that they might get on the trail of the robber leader, proved too strong an allurement to be resisted, and they were soon in the thick of the fighting with guerillas along the Rio Grande. How narrowly they escaped death on the land and in the air; their thrilling rescue of prisoners held by the enemy; how Phil himself was taken captive and held for ransom and the part that radio played in his escape; how "Muggs" Murray was tracked and brought to justice can be seen in the second volume of this series, entitled: "The

Radio Boys in the Flying Service; or, Held for Ransom by Mexican Bandits."

They had only been home a few weeks from this last experience when in this singular manner they had been brought in contact with Benton, this other soldier of fortune, who had declared that adventure was the breath of life to him. To all of them had come the impression that this was more than a chance meeting, and that in some way yet to be defined their future was to be bound up with his. It was this feeling that made them await with such intentness the words that he had seemed on the point of speaking.

For a full minute Benton seemed to be debating with himself. Then caution seemed to gain the upper hand, and he looked at them with a whimsical smile that was half apologetic.

"I guess the thing will keep," he remarked, "and anyway I'm too groggy just now to tell you clearly just what I have in my mind. But I sure do want to see more of you fellows, if you'll let me."

"Sure thing," replied Phil heartily, and the others echoed him. "Just now I think the best thing you can do is to get to town, have a doctor look you over and then settle down for a good night's rest. Then tomorrow perhaps we can get together again. That is, if your business doesn't make it necessary to get away from Castleton in a hurry."

"Not at all," answered Benton, as he got a little unsteadily to his feet. "In fact, I think Castleton will be the end of my present trip, though I didn't think so when I started out this morning."

The remark was rather cryptic, but the boys forbore any further questioning and busied themselves with harnessing up the horse, which seemed by this time to be in a thoroughly subdued frame of mind.

There was not room for all in the buggy and it was arranged that Phil should drive with Benton to the town, while Dick and Tom should follow on foot.

On their way in, Phil stopped at the first doctor's office they came across and luckily found the physician in. He gave Benton a thorough examination and found that, outside of bruises and a general shaking up, there was nothing serious the matter with him. A day or two of rest was his only prescription.

Phil invited Benton to put up at his home as a guest, and assured him of a welcome. The latter, however, declined with thanks, feeling a little shy about his "bunged-up condition," as he expressed it, but promised to come up to Phil's house the following night. At his request, Phil drove him to a good hotel. Then he left the horse and buggy in the care of the hostler and turned toward home.

On his way there he fell in with Dick and Tom coming in with the string of fish that, in the pressure of more important things, Phil had almost forgotten.

Phil swung into step with them, and they plunged at once into a discussion of the exciting events of the afternoon.

"Queer, wasn't it," said Dick, as he paused for a moment in front of Phil's home before separating from his comrades," how his hand flew to his breast at something Tom' said?"

"It was odd," agreed Tom. "I remember that I spoke of the horse as an old pirate. Nothing particular in that. But at the word 'pirate' Benton jumped as though he were shot."

CHAPTER III

Radio and Its Wonders

"Oh well, probably it was only a coincidence," remarked Phil. "As for Benton himself he struck me as just about all right. The kind of fellow you'd like to have at your back in a scrap."

"That's the way I sized him up, too," agreed Dick.

"He sure has seen a lot of the world," observed Tom, "and he's got a pair of eyes that aren't likely to have overlooked anything. I'm keen to see him again and start him talking."

"Well, he's promised to run up to the house tomorrw night," said Phil. "Be sure to get over, Dick."

"I'll be there with bells on," promised Dick as they separated.

He kept his word, and on the following night all three were gathered about the table on which Phil kept his radio set, when the bell rang and Benton was ushered into the room.

The Radio Boys gave him a rousing welcome, and he on his part was unaffectedly glad to see them.

"How are you feeling?" asked Phil, as he drew up a chair for him.

"Fine as silk," replied Benton. "This old head of mine has stopped its buzzing, and outside a little soreness I'm as well as ever. It takes nothing less than an axe to kill us old leather-necks," he added with a grin.

"I see that you fellows are radio fans," he went on, as he settled himself comfortably and nodded his head in the direction of the apparatus on the table.

"Thirty-third degree," replied Phil. "Are you a member of the fraternity, too?"

"I'm crazy over it," said Benton, as he bent over to examine the set. "I see you've got all the latest wrinkles, super-regenerative circuit and all that. What's your range?"

"Easily over a thousand miles," replied Phil, "and probably a good deal more than that. On quiet nights we've frequently picked up the signals of the Eiffel Tower in Paris and the station at Nauen, Germany. We've talked as far as Texas, and any night we want to we can listen in on a radio broadcast from Newark, Pittsburgh, Detroit and Chicago. We keep watches regulated by the nightly signals from Arlington. It's a peach of a set all right."

"We wouldn't know how to do without radio in the Navy," remarked Benton. "Every ship is equipped with it now, and the captain on his

bridge can talk as easily with the Department in Washington as though he were seated at a desk in the Secretary's room. Of course most of the work is done by the radio telegraph, but before long we'll be able to use the radio telephone just as well. I tell you it's a wonderful thing. No worrying your heart out now in a fog and mist and storm. You don't need to have the sun in order to get your bearings. You don't even need the lighthouses at night. Just get busy on your loop aerial and get in touch with shore stations and they'll tell you to a dot just what your latitude and longitude is. A blind man could navigate a ship nowadays. No one can figure how many vessels and how many lives have been saved by this blessed old radio."

"Right you are," agreed Phil. "I know that one time it saved mine. It's the youngest of all the sciences and yet it's made greater strides than any other in the history of the world. Every day something new develops, and it fairly makes you dizzy trying to keep up with it. It's revolutionized peace and it will revolutionize war."

"As a matter of fact," replied Benton, "it's going to make war practically impossible, because it would make it too terrible. A fleet of airplanes without a single man in them could fly over the cities of the enemy and drop high explosives that would destroy them all. The airplanes could be directed by radio many miles away.

The same is true of battleships. Torpedoes could be sent out from land and guided by radio directly against any ship it was desired to destroy. And all this without risk on the part of the attacking party.

"My ship was off the Virginia Capes last year," he went on, "when they were having that duel between airplanes and battleships, to test out which was the more effective. The old Iowa was picked out to be the victim of the plane attack. There wasn't a soul on board, and I tell you it seemed something uncanny to see how that big ship sailed along, turned, wheeled, zigzagged just as perfectly as if it had had its whole crew aboard. All the controls, rudder, propeller and steering devices were regulated by radio."

"It surely seems like a miracle, agreed Phil. "It's quite within the range of possibility that merchant ships after a while will be able to sail from America to Europe without a soul on board. The ship could send out signals every hour by which its path could be plotted by the shore operator over the entire route."

"And that's only a single feature of radio," put in Tom. "I see that in Italy and Germany they are locating ore and coal mines by means of radio. Radio waves are sent underground and by means of certain instruments the observer can notice the difference in the intensity of the

sounds received, and so can chart out the position of ore and coal veins. The old-time prospector will soon be a thing of the past, as extinct as the dodo. Of course they have to have supersensitive vacuum tubes, but the thing is being done every day. By the same means it will be possible to locate the position of buried treasures that have been carried down in sunken ships."

"What's that?" interrupted Benton with keen interest.

"Buried treasures," repeated Tom. "The principle is practically the same as in locating the coal veins. The difference in signals when the radio waves are coming from the ocean bed and those received when there is some big object on the bed like a ship will indicate the location of the object. Up to now it has been a matter of great difficulty to get the exact position of a sunken ship. A submarine would help some, but that can only be used where the water is comparatively shallow, for if the submarine went down too far it would be crushed by the increasing density of the water. But you can't crush radio waves. They go everywhere and through everything."

"Locating sunken ships," murmured Benton reflectively, almost as though he were talking to himself. "That sure is a new thing to me, though I try to keep pretty well up with things. I sure am glad to know it."

"Lost any ships lately?" asked Dick with a grin.

"Not exactly," replied Benton, "but I'm mighty interested in one that was lost a good long time ago."

"You're talking in riddles," laughed Phil. "Why not let us in on the story?"

Benton studied their faces for a full minute without replying. Then he straightened bolt upright in his chair as though he had reached a definite decision.

"I will," he said. "It's a queer story and perhaps you think I've gone loco before I get through with it. But first I want to ask a question. Are you fellows game for an adventure?"

The boys looked at one another and it was Phil that answered.

"Yes," he said, "if it's straight and legitimate and seems to us worth while. Of course we've got to know what it is first."

"That goes without saying," replied Benton. It's perfectly straight, and I think I can prove to you that it is worth while. I don't disguise from you, however, that it's attended with great risks. But it also has great rewards if it is successful."

"We've taken risks before," laughed Phil.

"I know you have," answered Benton. "I was sure that I had sized you boys up right last

night, and that's why I nearly told you then what I'm going to tell you now. But this thing means so much to me that I couldn't afford to act on first impressions. I don't mind telling you that I've been making inquiries about town today, and everything that I've learned proves that my first impressions were right.

"I've heard about your work in running down the counterfeiting gang in Florida. And I've learned about your adventures with the Mexican bandits and the way you rounded up 'Muggs' Murray. Perhaps you don't know it, but the people in this town think that you're about the finest fellows on the footstool."

"You must take that with a grain of salt," said Phil deprecatingly. "Local pride and all that, you know. We've just got into a few scrapes and had the luck to come out of them with a whole hide. That about lets us out."

"I prefer to take their verdict," smiled Benton, "and I have further proof if I needed it in what happened yesterday afternoon. At any rate, I'm perfectly satisfied in my own mind that you're the fellows I want to share my plan if it appeals to you. You see I'm somewhat in the position of a man who thinks he has a gold mine but can't work it alone."

He took a package of papers from his pocket and laid them on the table.

Tom nudged Phil mischievously.

"Say 'pirate'" he said, "and see Benton jump."

Benton looked puzzled for a moment. Then he laughed.

"I catch on," he said. "Well, there's a pirate in this story all right, but he's been a long time dead. Now just one other little thing. If after I've told you my plan you don't want to go in with me on it, I want you to promise me on your word of honor that you won't mention the matter to a living soul."

CHAPTER IV

Strange Happenings

The Radio Boys solemnly gave the required promise, and listened with breathless attention to the story that Benton unfolded.

"As I told you yesterday," he began, "my last term of service was in San Domingo. As you know, that borders on the Caribbean Sea, the old Spanish main that the buccaneers roved on for centuries. It's a tropical country, and to my mind a God-forsaken place, whose chief products are tarantulas, spiders, centipedes and scorpions. Most of the people are blacks or half-breeds, and of course revolutions are happening there every little while. Their armies are only mobs that a squad of American policemen could put to flight, and the chief difference between generals and privates is that the former have shoes while the latter are barefooted.

"They had been having one of these little revolutions when for some reason Uncle Sam took a hand. You know he acts as a sort of policeman to keep those little West Indian countries in order when they get a little too gay and

frisky. At any rate, we've had a little force of marines there for some years past, and it happened that I was sent down there with the last batch of leathernecks.

"It wasn't much of a task to keep the bigger towns in order, but it was diferent when we were sent out to clean up some of the outlaw bands in the interior of the island. There were plenty of these, and we had to watch our step, for they were bloodthirsty rascals and if any of our boys happened to fall into their hands it was all up with him. It wasn't merely death—that's part of the game in the marine service—but torture. And those bandits certainly were experts when it came to making a man die slow and hard."

Phil thought of Espato and his skill in the same gentle art.

"A couple of pals and myself," went on Benton, "were pushing along one day in a desolate patch of the jungle way off from the beaten road when we heard shrieks coming from a cabin. We made a break for it, and found a bunch of bandits torturing an old Spaniard. He lived alone there, and somehow the idea had got out that he had money concealed about the place. The outlaws had felt so confident that they had everything their own way that they hadn't set any watch and we took them by surprise. They had the old man bound on his bed, and were

burning him with hot irons to make him tell them where his money was hidden. We burst in on them while they were in the very midst of their infernal work, killed two of them and put the rest to flight.

"The old man was pretty well done for. It didn't seem practicable to get him in his condition to the nearest military post which was some distance away. So I sent the other fellows to report, and I stayed to nurse the old fellow. I didn't think he'd last out the next twenty-four hours, but he had surprising vitality for a man of his years and it was nearly a week before he passed away. He needed constant attention, and I was kept pretty well on the jump day and night.

"During that time I learned, of course, a good deal of his history. Part of it he told me, and part of it I picked up from what he kept babbling from time to time when he was delirious. It seemed that he had never married and that he had no relative that he knew of in the world. He had lived there for years, doing a little farming on his garden patch and getting barely enough to keep body and soul together. As for money, he didn't have any. That was where the bandits would have had their troubles for their pains.

"One morning I could see that death was pretty near, and the old man knew it too. He called me to him, thanked me over and over for what I had been able to do for him and then

told me that he was going to give me something that would make me rich. I thought his mind was wandering again, but he pointed out a place under the flooring of the cabin and asked me to dig down a couple of feet. I did it to humor him, and fished out an old tin box. I brought it to him and he took out the papers that I have just laid on the table."

The boys looked with the keenest interest at the package of papers that were mildewed and yellowed by time.

"He put those in my hands," continued Benton, "and told me they were mine. Said they had been handed down in his family for generations. It seems that the old man himself had had dreams of following up the clues that were contained in them. But it would take capital and he never had one dollar that he could lay on another. And he had been afraid to trust his secret to anyone else for fear that he would be either cheated or perhaps killed by those he might choose as partners. And so the years had dragged on and he had come at last to his deathbed without ever having derived any benefit from them. Now he gave them to me, and the only condition he attached was that if I got any benefit from them I would have a candle burned in some church for the repose of his soul."

Benton paused for a moment. No one spoke. They were envisaging the scene of that forlorn

old life coming to so pitiable an end in the depths of the San Domingo forest.

"Of course, I promised," Benton went on, "and as a matter of fact I saw to that matter of the candle as soon as I got back to the city. I didn't attach any importance to the old man's revelations. I'd have thought the whole thing was simply a sick man's ravings if it hadn't been for the papers. They at least were real, something that could be seen and handled. Probably they wouldn't amount to anything, but they promised at least to be a bit of interesting reading when I got back to the barracks.

"I buried the old man near his cabin and then hiked back to the nearest post. I was kept pretty busy for some time, and the papers remained stowed away in my kit bag.

"After a while, our squad was relieved from the interior work and sent back to the capital for a breathing spell and the mere routine duty called for. One day when I was off duty and time was hanging a little heavy on my hands, I though of the papers and fished them out. They had to be handled with care, as some of them were nearly falling to pieces.

"I soon found however that they didn't do me much good, for they were written in Spanish. Of course, in knocking about those countries I had picked up a good deal of the lingo, enough to get by with in ordinary conversation.

But that didn't help me so much when it came to reading about unfamiliar things, especially in the Spanish of two hundred years ago.

"And just here is where I made a mistake. There was a half breed that did odd jobs about the post, a fellow named Ramirez. He happened to be passing through the barracks just then on an errand for one of the officers, and I called him and asked him to translate one of the papers for me.

"He agreed, after bargaining that I should give him an American quarter for the job, which I did. He commenced to read. I listened for a while, and then I began to sit up and take notice. Believe me that by this time he was taking notice too. His hands were trembling, his voice was shaky and his eyes—he had about the wickedest pair of eyes I ever saw in a human head—were fairly shining with greediness.

"I snatched the paper back from him. He begged like a cripple to let him go on with it. Offered to give me back my quarter and do it for nothing. But by that time I was wise to the mistake I had made and told him to go along and roll his hoop. His eyes were like those of a rattlesnake when he realized I was in earnest.

"After I had finally got rid of him, I did some tall thinking. I got a dictionary and a grammar and settled down to learn the language. I took some lessons also from the old padre of

the church in which I had burned the candle. He was delighted at my sudden interest in what he called his 'beautiful mother tongue,' and did all he could to help me along. So in the course of time I was able to get the sense of these papers. Some of the words are blurred and some have been wiped out by time, but what I couldn't read I could at least make a very fair guess at.

"Before I had received the papers I had fully made up my mind to re-enlist, for as I told you before I was in love with the service. But after I had read them I began to count the days before my present term should expire. I had made up my mind that I was going to take a chance. I might fail, but if I did there was the good old service waiting for me at any time. And if I succeeded, there wouldn't be need of worrying about anything for the rest of my life.

"And now," he continued, as he knocked the ash from his cigar and glanced at the faces of his spellbound auditors, "that about brings me up to the present time. Oh yes, there's one thing more—about that Ramirez.

"That fellow dogged me like my shadow for the rest of the time I was in San Domingo. He kept turning up at the most unexpected places. I got tired of it at last and told him to keep out of my way or he'd be sorry for it. One night when we were camping out, I woke up to find someone rifling my kit in my tent. I jumped

up and tackled him, but he got away after knifing me in the arm."

He rolled up his sleeve and showed a deep scar just above the elbow.

"That's the memento he left me," he remarked grimly. "In the darkness I couldn't be sure, but I thought I recognized Ramirez. The first thing I did after getting a light and binding up my arm was to look for the papers. Luckily they were at the bottom of my kit and the thief hadn't got to them when I woke up. Another thing that makes me think it was Ramirez is that the rascal disappeared from his usual haunts after that and I've never seen anything of him since. But it goes to show," he added with that whimsical smile of his, "that I'm not the only one who attaches some importance to these papers.

"Now let's see how they strike you," he continued, drawing his chair closer to the table, while the Radio Boys crowded eagerly about him.

CHAPTER V

Marooned

There were many separate papers in the package that Benton spread out before the fascinated eyes of the boys. Only one or two larger sheets seemed like a consecutive narrative. Others were mere scraps of paper that looked as though they had been picked up in lieu of something better for the writer to put his thoughts upon.

Bitter thoughts most of them were, thoughts of vengeance, imprecations upon the authors of alleged wrongs from which the writer had suffered, chants of hate that semed as though they might have blistered the paper on which they were written. As the boys handled carefully those yellowed sheets of paper, so brittle from time that they were almost falling apart, so yellowed that in many cases the writing was almost illegible, the years rolled away and before them rose up the picture of that solitary figure on an island in the Caribbean eating his heart out with rage and hate and finding his only solace in setting down from day to day his prayers for venge-

ance on the souls of those who had brought him to that pass.

Benton had arranged them as nearly as might be in chronological order and kept up a running series of comments and explanations as he went along.

"You can see," he said, "that the writing isn't merely a scrawl. It was the work of a man with considerable education. I've gathered from the story as I went through it that he was the son of a well to do family in one of the colonies that bordered on the Carribbean Sea about two centuries ago. Those were wild and reckless days in that quarter of the world, with the buccaneers roaming up and down the Spanish Main, sinking ships and once in a while attacking the towns on the coast and robbing them of their treasures. This fellow was probably the black sheep of some respectable family who went to the bad and ran away and joined the pirates. Probably he was just as bad as any of the rest of them, though to read his story you'd think that he was a poor persecuted man and that all the wrong was on the side of his shipmates.

"You know that in those days the pirates had a code of laws of their own. They were some of the vilest wretches that ever went unhung and flouted all the laws of the civilized nations of the world. They were Ishmaels, their hands against every man's and every man's

hands against them. But even they had to have some laws of their own, or the Brotherhood, as they called their choice collection of scoundrels, would have gone to pieces.

"Now one of the laws that they laid most store by was that whenever a ship or a town was looted, none of the pirates should hold out any particular bit of treasure that he might come across. Everything was to be brought and placed in a great pile at the foot of the mast on the pirate ship and then a division was made, so much to the captain, so much to the mates, so much to each member of the crew.

"The punishment for any member of the crew who was caught violating this law was that he should be marooned. That meant that he was to be taken to some one of the many little desolate islands that stud the Caribbean, put ashore with about enough provisions to last him a month and then left to shift for himself.

"In most cases that amounted to a sentence of death. Either the man would starve after his provisions were exhausted, or even if he succeeded for a time in dragging out a miserable existence he would go mad from loneliness and hopelessness. It was one of the punishments most dreaded by the pirates of the Brotherhood.

"Well, marooning was what happened to Santos, the pirate whose writing is on these papers. Likely enough he deserved it, though he

says he didn't. You can see what he says here."

Benton picked up one of the sheets and read:

"I swear by the Holy Virgin that at the taking of the galleon Ciudad de Rodrigo I rendered to the common mass every doubloon and jewel that I had taken from the passengers before they were made to walk the plank. But Cerillos the captain—may his soul be accursed—hated me because he feared that I might some day supplant him, and brought it about that a crucifix with gems upon it was found in my sea chest. But I swear that I knew it not."

"You see," resumed Benton, as he laid down the paper, "he claims that he was the victim of what in these days we would call a 'frame-up.' Maybe he was and maybe he wasn't. You know that most criminals when they go to the electric chair proclaim that they are innocent.

"However that may be, they seemed to have the goods on the old boy, and he was taken to this island, where he was put ashore and left to live or die as fate might decree.

"Where that island was is a most important matter, and on that we haven't any too much information. There are scores, probably hundreds of them in the Caribbean. Some of them are mere rocks a few acres in extent. Others cover a good many square miles. This one where Santos was marooned was one of the larger ones,

and there was enough in the way of fruits and cocoanuts together with what fish he could catch to keep him alive.

"Now the only clue we have," Benton continued, picking up a frayed piece of paper, "to the location of the island is this rough sketch that Santos drew. You can see for yourself that it's like a rough quadrangle in shape."

The boys bent over and scanned with eyes shining with excitement the rude outline. There were wavy lines to indicate the water, and a blacker mass which was evidently intended for the island itself. On this were peaks rising to a considerable height, and the effect of the skyline was something like the teeth of a saw. There were figures on the map almost illegible, but by the aid of a magnifying glass which Phil took from a drawer they could make out what seemed to be the figures "14" and "81."

"That's probably the latitude and longitude," exclaimed Dick, while Phil made a dive for an atlas.

"So I figured it," replied Benton. "Probably the old boy made more or less of a guess at it, but in a rough way it's likely to be correct. It isn't probable that he had any instruments with him, but if what he says of the captain's jealousy is correct it indicates that he was an important figure in the crew and probably had some knowl-

edge of navigation. If he had had any ambition to supplant the captain, he'd have to know something about latitude and longitude."

By this time Phil had found the page in the atlas referring to the West Indies, and was running his finger down it.

"Latitude 14, longitude 81," he repeated. "Here it is in the Caribbean somewhere on a line between Jamaica and Honduras."

"That's correct," assented Benton. "And there's one very important point connected with that special location. You know that the Caribbean varies greatly in depth. In places it's thousands of feet deep. In others there are hundreds of miles where the water is very shallow, where what seem to be great plateaus rise from the bed of the sea to within a hundred or two hundred feet of the surface. Now one of these shallow basins is that which lies between Jamaica and Honduras. Then too, the old pirate mentions in one part of this diary of his that when the vessel from which he was marooned was approaching the island, soundings were taken by the captain. That was because he knew he was in shallow waters and feared he might run aground.

"Now bear this fact in mind," Benton adjured them impressively, "for on it hangs the whole story."

CHAPTER VI

The Sunken Treasure

Phil put away the atlas and the boys redoubled their attention.

"It's a thing to be noticed all through these papers," Benton went on, "that the old pirate's prayers for vengeance were on the *souls* of his enemies. That was because their bodies had passed beyond the reach of vengeance. For within a couple of hours after his comrades had marooned him, Santos had the satisfaction of seeing the pirate ship, the *Sea Rover,* as it was named, go down in a hurricane with all hands on board.

"Just listen to this:

"God be praised," he read, "for what mine eyes this day have seen. For scarce had Cerillos sailed, after he had landed me on this accursed island and jeered at me as I sat in my misery on the beach, than a hurricane sprang up, one of the fiercest and most sudden that I have ever known in all my voyaging on the Main. It caught him unaware, and before ever he could furl sail the ship careened and went down less than a mile

from shore. Never a man escaped, though for days after bodies floated to the beach. Among them was that of Cerillos, which I spat and stamped upon. How I danced! How I shouted! How I cheered! The devil had got his own. May their souls roast in flames for all eternity!"

"The old boy was certainly a good hater," remarked Phil.

"He sure was," laughed Benton, "and he never got over it. Ravings like that are scattered all through the papers. But only second to that is the old fellow's regret that so much treasure should have been swallowed up by the sea. He rejoiced in the fate of the crew but would have liked to save the ship, for from what he says it seems to have been a floating mint. And he isn't speaking from guesswork either, for he had been on it all through its last voyage and knew what it contained. See what he says here:

"It irketh me sore," the writing ran, "to think that all that noble treasure lieth at the bottom of the sea. For never had we taken such goodly prizes as on that last scouring of the Main. There was the plate on the galleon *Santa Maria* that we cut out of the squadron off the Isle of Oruba, and the gold louis from the *Cité de Marseilles* that cost us so dear in blood and the treasure that came from the sacking of Port au Prince —doubloons and pieces of eight that it might take a man a day to reckon. Yet now it is nought

or as good as nought, though had I a lugger and a dozen lusty fellows at my back I might e'en yet run my fingers through it. For it lieth not far from shore, and the waters be so shallow that had the mast not snapped they might yet be seen."

Then followed wild imprecations on the fate that had doomed him to be marooned on that desolate island, while just beyond his reach were riches almost beyond the dreams of avarice.

Other parts of the writings were in calmer mood and abounded in plans that he purposed carrying out for the recovery of the treasure, if he were ever rescued. But as time passed on, he seemed to have abandoned hope, and it was evident that his mind was giving way, for certain scraps of paper were full of incoherent exclamations and vague maunderings.

When Benton came to the last of them and gathered them up the room was so silent that the boys could almost hear the beating of their hearts. Their thoughts were in a tumult.

Benton was the first to break the silence.

"There's just one thing to be added," he said. "The old Spaniard who gave me these papers told me that the family tradition, as it had come down to him, was that his ancestor had finally been rescued, but only when his mind was almost gone. But he still had sense enough to guard jealously these papers, which he bequeathed to

his son with injunctions to go and find the treasure. Nothing however had ever come of it, I suppose from time to time some of the family had vague notions of doing something about it, but they never materialized.

"Now to sum the thing up. It seems to me perfectly clear that these things actually happened. The papers on their face bear evidence of their truth. This old pirate lived and sinned and cursed and suffered and died on an island somewhere about latitude 14, longitude 81 in the Caribbean Sea. He saw the sinking of the *Sea Rover* a little way off from the island. The ship was laden with a large amount of treasure. The waters where it sank were comparatively shallow.

"There's the story, and the only living people that know anything about it are gathered at this moment in this room."

"Except perhaps Ramirez," put in Phil reflectively.

"Oh yes, Ramirez," corrected Benton with a slight start. "But he just got a hint of it. He hasn't the papers and he's probably forgotten most of what he did read. He's just a worthless, ignorant half breed anyway. I think we can dismiss him from our calculations."

"I've told you now all I know. What about it?"

"Let's go!" cried Phil.

"I'm with you," exclaimed Dick.

"Count me in," added Tom.

Benton jumped to his feet.

Hurrah!" he cried, as he shook hands with each in turn. "I knew I wasn't making a mistake. You're all wool and a yard wide-fellows after my own heart—a red-blooded bunch of young Americans who are not afraid to take a chance!"

CHAPTER VII

A Hazardous Venture

"And now," said Benton, after the excitement had somewhat subsided, glancing at his watch, "I've kept you fellows up till the wee sma' hours, and I guess we've had enough for one night. We'll sleep over it and get together tomorrow and see how things look in the cold grey dawn of the morning after.

"Mind," he continued, as he gathered up his papers and made ready to depart, "I don't want to sweep you fellows off your feet. There are a whole lot of things to be considered, and while I'm tickled to death by the way you feel about it, I don't hold you to the decision that you've made tonight. I take that just as the statement of your personal attitude toward the matter. If on thinking it over more carefully you should change your minds, I'd be horribly disappointed, but I wouldn't feel a bit sore. In other words, I want the decision to be not a matter of momentary enthusiasm but of cool judgment, after you've considered all the pros and cons."

"It's bully of you to feel that way about it,"

responded Phil warmly, "but we've got used to making rather quick decisions, and so far we've won out. Besides our decision wasn't made at the minute you asked for it. It had been forming in our minds all the time we were going through those papers. Of course we'll have to talk with our folks about it, but we've persuaded them before to let us have our way in these matters, and I guess we can again. At any rate if we don't, it won't be for lack of trying."

"One other thing," broke in Dick. "There's a pal of ours named Steve Elwood. Just at present he's in New York. He's no end of a good fellow, and I'm sure he'd like to go along with us. Would you have any objection?"

"Not if he's like the rest of you and you will vouch for him," replied Benton with a smile. "We're rather shorthanded as it is, and five won't be too many."

"We'll vouch for him, all right," said Phil, and the others seconded him enthusiastically. "He was with us in Florida and Mexico, and he just eats up danger."

"That's the kind we want," replied Benton. "Go to it then and get in touch with him as soon as you can. So long, fellows. See you tomorrow, and we'll get busy on the question of ways and means."

There was very little sleep for any of the Radio Boys that night. They had been too

stirred up by the vista opened up by their interview with Benton. And when toward morning they dropped off into a troubled slumber, their dreams were a jumble of pirate ships and lonely islands and tumbling waters and coins that gleamed and shimmered in tropical sunlight.

But the morning saw no slackening in their resolution of the night before. A strong appeal had been made to their imagination and their love of adventure, and that appeal persisted.

Naturally, the appeal was much less strong to the members of their families, when with considerable mental misgivings the boys opened up the subject to them, after having enjoined them to strict secrecy as far as outsiders were concerned.

There was a chorus of expostulations and objections, to all of which the boys made answer as best they could. But the strongest arguments lay in the way they had come through the perilous adventures they had previously undergone. Their folks had to admit that in these they had shown qualities of coolness and good judgment, in addition to courage, that had extricated them from all their difficulties. Why was it not reasonable to believe that the same qualities would stand them in good stead in their present venture?

In the end, Phil and Dick prevailed, as they

had felt sure that they would, although the consent was a grudging one. Tom had a harder task, as his father was in Chicago, and their talk had to be over the radio, concerning which the elder Hadley was as ardent a "fan" as the son himself. They had a code of their own, but naturally even with that the talk had to be a guarded one, and dealt with the matter in a much more general way than would have been the case in a personal talk, where Tom could have brought his big guns to bear. The result was that Tom got a qualified consent, which was not to be regarded as final however, until the elder Hadley had received full details in a letter which Tom was to write to him at once.

"So far, so good," remarked Tom, at the end of the struggle, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow. "Now I'll have to give my natural eloquence a chance and spread it all over my letter. Just wait till you see that letter. It's going to be a cuckoo. But I haven't any doubt as to how it will turn out. Dad's a good sport, and he's taken chances himself all his life. I'll bet he'd like to be in on this himself."

Phil in the meantime had been writing to Steve, laying the matter before him, and enjoining him by all that was good to let him have an answer in twenty-four hours.

"Humph!" sniffed Dick, as he glanced over

Phil's shoulder. "Twenty-four hours! He'll telegraph an answer in five minutes after he reads the letter. I know Steve."

"I guess you're about right," smiled Phil. "You've got the old boy pretty well sized up."

There was so much to do that day that the time passed as though on wings, and in the evening, in accordance with arrangements made over the telephone, Benton came up again to get their final word on the matter.

"No need to ask though," he remarked, when the first greetings were over. "I can see that there are no cold feet in this crowd."

"Warm as toast," laughed Phil. "There was considerable chilliness about the pedal extremities of our folks though. We had to talk until we were hoarse. We carried out point though, and as far as Dick and I are concerned the matter's a go. Tom's been talking over the radio and the thing's still in the air, but Tom considers it as good as settled. I've written to Steve too, and we expect to get an answer tomorrow by telegraph."

"Some speed boys," smiled Benton, "but that's the way to go at it. Either it's worth nothing at all, or it's worth every ounce of speed and energy we can put in it. What were some of the objections that your folks put up."

"Well, there were a good many of them," replied Phil. "First of course was the danger.

They conjured up all sorts of horrible things, sudden tropical storms, drowning, sharks and things like that. Then too, they thought that it was in the nature of a wild goose chase. If the ship had been sunken recently, they'd have thought we had more of a chance. But two centuries ago seems a long while. They thought the ship might have broken up, sunk in the sand, wholly disappeared."

"There's something of course in that," Benton admitted. "And yet treasure has been brought up from the ships of the Spanish Armada that sank over three hundred years ago. What has happened once may happen again. As for the danger, of course there is some. But nothing venture nothing have, and if we are successful the rewards will be great enough to compensate for the risk."

"Just what we argued," replied Phil. "And then who can tell where danger lies? A man may sail the seas for forty years without a scratch, and then come home to be drowned in a cistern. After all, life itself is just taking a chance."

"Right you are," put in Dick. "If this venture goes through, we'll have pulled off a big thing. But even suppose it doesn't go through. We'll have seen a new part of the world, will have had lots of fun and adventure and the game will have been worth the candle."

"And just think what it means if we put it over," added Tom. "Just think of pulling up those ducats and doubloons and louis d'or and all the rest of them from the bottom of the sea. It seems a shame to have all that money doing no one any good, when it might be put into circulation."

"Old ocean sure is greedy," replied Benton. "Think of the hundreds of millions, probably billions, that have been engulfed at some time or other. Probably ten millions went down on the *Lusitania,* the *Titanic* and the *Arabic.* Then there's the *Laurentic* that went down in 1917 with from ten to fifteen millions on board. They've already brought up about three millions of that though. Then there was the fleet of Spanish ships that sank in the harbor of Vigo, Spain, in 1702 carrying down $37,000,000. There's the *San Pedro de Alcantara* that sank in Margarita Channel near Caracas in 1812 with $32,000,000 in gold doubloons on board. You've read perhaps of the American ship *Phantom* that was wrecked in 1862 with $10,000,000 in California gold. The *George Sand* sank in the China Sea in 1863 carrying down $13,000,000 in bullion. And those are only a few of the hundreds of ships that have carried down hundreds of thousands or millions. There's probably enough gold under the waves to make a solid golden

pathway a good many feet wide over the whole of the ocean bed."

"Well, here's hoping that there'll be less of it under water when we get through," laughed Tom.

"Let's hope so," smiled Benton, "but now let's shift for a little while to another metal and get right down to brass tacks."

CHAPTER VIII

Counting the Cost

"The first thing to be done," continued Benton, as they all gathered about the table, "is to figure on the cost of the expedition. In this, as in everything else, we need the 'sinews of war.' We've got to lay in supplies, purchase a diving suit, charter a sailing vessel after we reach San Domingo and lots of other things. It can't be done under five thousand dollars and we'd better figure on ten. How about it?"

"That's all right," answered Phil promptly. "We've talked it over among ourselves and estimated that it would be somewhere between those two amounts. A year ago it might have stumped us a bit, but the reward we got from the bank for the capture of Muggs Murray and the generous way in which Uncle Sam treated us after we had helped to run down the counterfeiters has put us on Easy Street."

"Good," said Benton. "I have a little wad of my own stowed away, and we'll go in on an even basis. There are five of us—that is, if

your friend Elwood comes in with us—and that will make from one to two thousand each that we will have to put up. And of course it is understood that we share alike in all the profits of the expedition."

"Seems to me that you ought to have a larger share than the rest of us," objected Phil. "You're the one that got the papers, without which there wouldn't be any trip at all."

"Not a bit of it," protested Benton. "The papers wouldn't do me any good unless I had fellows like you to help me realize on them. No, it's got to be 'hoss and hoss,' share and share alike. That is," he added, with his whimsical smile, "if there's anything to be shared. We're counting our chickens before they are hatched."

"I suppose the first leg of our journey will be from here to some of the West India Islands," said Dick.

"Yes," answered Benton. "I figure that we'd better go from here to New York by rail, and then by one of the regular steamers to San Domingo. When we reach there, it will be up to us to charter a small fast sailing vessel in which we can cruise around in the Caribbean while we're trying to locate the old pirate's island. We'll drop down to the neighborhood of latitude 14, longitude 81, keeping our eyes open for any island whose skyline looks like the teeth of a saw."

"How about navigating the sloop?" asked Phil.

"Leave that to me," responded Benton. "I thought one time before I joined the marines of going into the merchant service and studied for the position of mate. I got my papers too and can handle a ship with the best of them. But the marine service appealed to me more strongly because of the greater chances of advanture, and so I passed the other up. But I haven't let myself get rusty, and I've had a lot of practical experience. I'm as much at home on a boat as I am in the barracks. But how about you young fellows? Know anything about sailing?"

"Not on the ocean," replied Phil, "but we've done considerable cruising on the Great Lakes, which are the next thing to the sea itself. We know enough about ropes and sails to understand orders and to obey them promptly. If you'll act as captain, we think we can qualify as crew, especially on as small a boat as we expect to handle."

"That's dandy," replied Benton, "and when we get down to San Domingo we'll do a lot of cruising just off shore so that you can get thoroughly familiar with your work before cutting loose for the big adventure. That removes a lot of worry from my mind, for I'd hate like thunder to have to ship a crew from the kind of material you find in a West Indian port. They're

smart enough sailors, but as a rule a bad lot to have on any trip, let alone an expedition that's looking for treasure.

"Now as to supplies. We've got to take along guns, revolvers and plenty of ammunition. Then we'll need dynamite and blasting powder—"

"I don't see exactly where that comes in," remarked Tom.

"For use in getting to the treasure," explained Benton. "Granted that we locate the ship, it's altogether unlikely that we'd be able to get through the hatches. They'd in all likelihood be crusted with barnacles or covered with silt and sea growths that would make it impossible for the diver to get into the hold unaided. But he could plant a charge of dynamite, and then after he'd been drawn up the charge could be fired by means of an electric spark from a battery in the boat above. That would tear a big hole in the deck and give the diver a chance to get in.

"Speaking of the diver," Benton went on, "brings us to one of the most important things of all, and that is the diving suit. We can't afford to get any but the best, for the man that goes down in it literally takes his life in his hands. The work though is less dangerous than it used to be because of the improvements that have been made.

"For instance, in the old-fashioned suits the

fresh air was served to the diver from the surface of the water through a tube and the pressure within the suit was increased to equal the pressure outside of it. But the more modern suit that I have in mind eliminates the necessity of the air tube. The diver carries his own oxygen with him in a tank that is fitted into a steel shell that is a part of the suit. Beside the oxygen tank is another tank containing caustic soda which absorbs the carbon dioxide given out by the expelled breath of the diver. A valve operates to deliver a certain amount every hour of oxygen properly mixed with nitrogen.

"You see how much safer the diver is under these conditions. Most of the danger used to lie in accidents to the air tube. It might get entangled, or cut or bitten by a shark and then it was all up with the diver. Now he's independent of that. He can work longer at a time and with much greater peace of mind.

"Then too he can see under water much better than he did in the old days. The head piece of this suit I'm talking of has four openings which are fitted with heavy glass, so that he can look out in front or on either side without shifting his position. And as the diver goes down, three blazing lights of many hundred candle power each, in glass especially made to resist pressure, are let down with him so that instead

of groping around he can work at his ease in a great zone of light that floods the water and the ocean bed for many yards on all sides of him.

"Moreover they're using manganese bronze nowadays for the trunk and headpiece of the diving suit and that is a good many times stronger than steel. Take it altogether, the work of the diver isn't nearly as hard and perilous as it used to be."

"No cinch though under the best of conditions, I should think," put in Dick.

"That's true enough," assented Benton, "but the point is that with all these latterday advantages it doesn't take as long to learn the business as it used to. Another thing that adds to his safety and facilitates his work is a telephone wire that is attached to the cable by which he is lowered and pulled up, by means of which he can keep in constant communication with his helpers above.

"Still, although the work has been made so much easier and safer than it used to be, there is still a certain amount of actual experience that one has to have before he can carry it on effectively. If we had to work at great depths, there'd be nothing left for us but to take a diver along. But from what the old pirate said about the soundings and the fact that the *Sea Rover's* masts would show above the water after she

sank if they had not been snapped off by the hurricane, I figure that the depth won't be much more if any than about fifty feet.

"Now if we had to take a diver with us, he'd have to know all about the treasure, and that might lead to all sorts of complications. What occurred to me was this. There's a good deal of dredging being done in the vicinity of San Domingo, and in my off hours I used to watch it being done and got quite chummy with one of the divers. He's a regular fellow, and I'm sure he'd be glad to do me a favor. When we get down to San Domingo, I'll hunt him up and ask him to take one of us and give him some practical lessons in the diver's business. We'll have to be there several weeks perhaps, while we're getting our stores and chartering our boat, and in that time it ought to be possible to get enough experience for the work we have to do. We'll pay him well of course for his trouble, and he probably won't bother us much with curious questions. If he does, it will be easy enough to evade them."

"Count me in as a volunteer," broke in Phil. "The thing has always had a wonderful fascination for me, and it would be a great experience to find one's self walking on the bottom of the sea."

"How about me?" asked Tom.

"And me too," chimed in Dick. "Don't for-

get your uncle Dick." Benton smiled at their enthusiasm.

"I can see that you fellows need the brake rather than the spur," he said. "You'd all perhaps better have a taste of it, but in the limited time we'll have it would be better to single out one and let him have the main part of the experience. But that's a matter of detail and we'll have plenty of time to settle that later."

"Of course, we'll take a radio set along," suggested Phil.

"That goes without saying," replied Benton. "We'll want it on our boat and we'll want it when we get to the island. There may be times when it'll be the only thing that'll stand between us and death. It'll keep us in constant touch with civilization. If Robinson Crusoe had had a radio set, he wouldn't have had to stay long on his island. There are always United States naval ships in the waters of the Caribbean, and if we got into trouble they'd come to our help in a jiffy."

For several hours they discussed their plans, and when at last Benton arose to go they felt that they had overlooked little and had marked out a pretty complete program.

The next few days were busy ones for Benton and the Radio Boys. Each one was assigned a certain part of the work, and they kept the radio busy ordering from different cities the

objects necessary for the expedition. Passage was engaged on one of the steamers sailing for San Domingo.

And the reservations were for five instead of four, for as Dick had predicted, Steve's acceptance of his invitation came by telegraph, to be followed by a letter in which he expressed his delight at the prospective adventure and prophesied in glowing terms the success of the treasure hunt.

"The old boy's in it with both feet," grinned Phil as the Radio Boys read the letter together.

"I knew he would be," chortled Dick. "Just speak to him of adventure and it's like showing catnip to a cat. He goes crazy over it."

"He'll get his fill of it on this trip or I miss my guess," laughed Tom. "Gee, but it seems a long time to wait before we get to that old pirate's island. I'd like to start tonight."

But all things come to him who waits, or as Dick amended it "to him who hustles while he waits," and finally the day came when all their preparations were complete, when the farewells were said and they set their faces southward toward the sunlit waters of the Caribbean.

CHAPTER IX

"Man Overboard!"

"Off at last," exclaimed Benton, as he leaned back in the luxurious seat of the Pullman. "I can hardly believe that my plans are really beginning to work out the way I've been dreaming about for months."

"Just wait till you get on board ship and find out you're skipper of the craft," grinned Phil. "I suppose you'll get so haughty that you won't care to notice us. We'll only be the foremast hands."

"By the time we get back, I'm willing to wager that you all will have learned a good deal about sailing," asserted Benton.

"Even if you have to knock it into our heads with a belaying pin, I suppose," grinned Tom.

"I hope it won't be necessary to use such strong persuasion," smiled Benton. "Still, that's the time-honored method at sea, you know."

"It must make a difference when the crew are part owners in the vessel, though," remarked Dick.

"Oh, that makes all the difference in the

world," laughed the ex-marine. "If I get rough, I suppose you'd fire me at the first port of call, so I'll have to try and act nice."

"You'd better," threatened Phil. "We may get to be experts at handling belaying pins, too."

"Stow that talk, you swabs," exclaimed Tom, assuming a fierce scowl. "Heave a bucket over the side and scrub down the decks. Step lively, you slab-sided sons of sea cooks. Shiver me toplights, but you're slow. I'll—"

"You'll dry up, that's what you'll do," said Phil, as he and Dick landed on Tom and proceeded to shove his head into the soft seat cushions. "See if that will take some of the saltiness out of you."

Sounds of muffled expostulation came from the depths of the seat, and at last Tom struggled free with a face that was fairly crimson from partial suffocation.

"Why don't you throw me out of the window and kill me quick?" he asked in an injured tone. "I was just trying to get you a little familiar with nautical language, and that's what I get for my trouble. I'd be better off if I left you steeped in ignorance."

"We don't mind being ignorant," Dick assured him. "We can't all hope to know as much as you."

"You can hope to, but you never will," retorted Tom, and slipped nimbly into the aisle as

he saw Dick getting ready to jump for him again. For a few seconds the latter hesitated, but then dropped back into his seat with a laugh.

"Wait till we get you on board the ship and we'll soon find out how much you know," he said. "How about it, Jack?"

"Well, I guess we're none of us apt to know too much about nautical matters," answered Benton.

"By the time we get back we'll know more anyway," said Phil. "Come on and sit down, Tom. We'll forgive you."

"I don't need to be forgiven for telling you the plain facts," said Tom, resuming his seat, though at the same time keeping a cautious watch on the others. "I wish I were going to be skipper on this trip. Believe me, you'd step around lively before I got through with you."

"After we got through with you, you'd *never* step again," grinned Phil, "lively or slow either. Eh, Dick?"

"You told it," agreed his friend emphatically. "Some dark night he'd go over the rail so fast he'd think he was flying, and that would be the end of old Skipper Tom."

"I'll have to watch my step and keep away from the rail," laughed Benton. "You fellows seem to have everything doped out in case of need."

"Oh, don't mind them," said Tom loftily.

"They wouldn't have the nerve to throw a blind pup overboard."

"Be nice now, or you'll get another dose of the cushions," warned Dick.

"I don't know how to be anything else," Tom serenely assured them, with such calm conviction that they had to laugh.

When they arrived in New York, Steve was waiting for them at the railway terminal, and after the first joyous greetings were over he was introduced to their new friend, with whom he was soon on the most cordial terms. Steve insisted that they all stop at his home during their stay in the "Big Town," which they did up to the day of sailing.

This soon arrived, and one fine sunny morning they found themselves steaming past the Statue of Liberty, outward bound for San Domingo and the sunken treasure ship.

The first two days passed uneventfully, but not without the keenest interest and pleasure to the Radio Boys, whose sailing had been confined mostly to inland waters.

On the third day when they were well on their way to their destination, they were lolling in their steamer chairs close to the starboard rail when they heard a shriek, followed by a loud splash in the water alongside.

Leaping to their feet they rushed to the rail just in time to see a scared black face with roll-

ing eyes that swept past in the froth of the steamer's wake.

With Phil, action followed like lightning on the heels of thought. He tore off his coat, leaped to the rail, balanced himself for an instant, then straight as an arrow dove into the sea.

He rose some distance away, dashed the water from his eyes and made for the woolly black head that showed clearly against the foam of the wake.

In the meantime the cry "Man overboard!" had been raised on the steamer and echoed by a score of throats. It was heard on the bridge, and in a few seconds the steady beat of the engines ceased, and then the whole ship shuddered and shook as they went into reverse. Quickly the speed was checked and a boat was lowered. The oars dipped and the boat sped toward the two figures in the water.

Phil, using the crawl stroke in which he was an expert, and which fairly ate up the distance was quickly at the side of the struggling figure. Not a second too soon either, as the negro's eyes were glassy and he was evidently at the last gasp. Perhaps this was fortunate, as otherwise in his frantic fear he might have embarassed his rescuer.

Phil grabbed him from the back by his shirt and held him so that his head was well above the surface. For a moment he trod water, and

then with his helpless burden struck out toward the oncoming boat.

That boat was now coming at a tremendous rate. And there was need for haste. For the keen eyes of the mate standing in the bow had seen something behind the swimmer that thrilled him with horror.

Cleaving the water two hundred yards in the rear was the dorsal fin of a shark. The pirate of the seas had scented prey and was coming toward it with terrible speed.

"Row, men, row," shouted the mate. "A shark! For God's sake, row! Put your backs into it. Row! Row!"

The men toiled feverishly at their work and the oars almost bent double.

They were so near now that Phil heard the shout of the mate and looked behind him. He saw that ominous fin, and for an instant his heart stood still. But he never dreamed of relinquishing his burden. With savage energy he lunged forward, straining every muscle in what he knew now was a race for life.

Nearer and nearer came the shark, and nearer and nearer came the boat. Phil set up a tremendous splashing that he hoped would keep the enemy at bay. For an instant it did daunt him, but only for an instant. He was too near victory thus to be balked of his prey.

There was a flash of white as he turned on his back and opened his horrible jaws.

Down into those jaws went crashing the end of a heavy oar driven by the brawny arms of the mate. At the same instant, ready hands reached over and dragged Phil and his burden into the boat, where they lay panting and exhausted.

"A close call, son," gasped the mate, and his men grinned their satisfaction and relief. You've never been so near death as you were that minute. Thought that shark had you sure."

"And he would have had, if it hadn't been for you and your men," said Phil, so exhausted that he could only speak haltingly. "It was your hard work and quick thinking that saved my life, and I can't thank you enough for it."

They were soon on the steamer's deck, where Phil was welcomed almost as one from the grave by his pale and rejoicing companions, and lionized by the passengers to an extent that embarrassed him beyond measure.

As for the man he had rescued, or boy rather, for he seemed to be about nineteen or twenty years old, he had soon so far recovered as to be able to answer some of the questions of the passengers who crowded around him.

"Huccome ah fall ovahboa'd?" he said, with a feeble grin. "Kain't rightly say, 'ceptin' Ah wuz leanin' too fur ovah de rail. Ole ship guv

a roll an' Ah fin's mahself tryin' ter drink de whole Atlantic Ocean. Kain't nebber res' on dis ole ship dat sumfin doan' happen ter spoil mah fun."

"That fun would have been over for good, if that young fellow hadn't jumped over for you," said one of the ship's officers. "You'd better find out who it was and thank him."

"Dat's jes' whut Ah aims ter do ef Ah kin fin' him. Dah he is now," he added excitedly, as his eyes fell on Phil's dripping clothes. "Dah's de young gemmun whut saved mah life," and running forward he fell on his knees in front of Phil and tried to catch his hand.

Phil flushed at this action and at the murmur of admiration and applause that came from the onlookers.

"Shucks" he exclaimed. "You don't have to thank me for simply doing what anyone else might have done. I happened to be near the rail and had the chance."

"Jes de same you did it, an' Ah'm plumb grateful," declared the negro. "Dis darky wud hev been shark's meat by dis time ef ut hedn't been fur you. Ah doan' know whar you-all ez goin', but whareber et is, Ah'll go wiv you, ef you let me."

"Well, we'll talk it over later," replied Phil, hardly knowing what reply to make to the offer.

The darky seemed to take the matter as settled, however and after he had gone below and got on some dry clothing, he appeared on deck again and hung around Phil and the rest of his party, much after the manner of a faithful dog. At first they were in a quandary, but after considerable discussion they decided to include the negro in their trip. According to his own account, he was a good cook, and they knew that they could find use for some one in that capacity after they had secured their boat. Then too he was as strong as a bull, and might prove an important addition to their little party in case of danger.

Bimbo, as the negro was named, was overjoyed when told that he would be allowed to accompany them, and executed an impromptu buck and wing dance that gave them a new idea of his quality as an entertainer. From the very first he made himself exceedingly useful, and before many days had passed they wondered how they had gotten along without him.

One afternoon, as they were nearing the end of their voyage, Benton called the boys together on a deserted part of the deck. They could tell from his agitated appearance that something was wrong.

He did not keep them long in suspense. It seemed that shortly after dinner he had been

strolling along the decks when suddenly, in a group of several men working at a windlass, he had seen Ramirez, the half-breed.

Benton's first impulse had been to leap for the rascal and avenge the attempt the halfbreed had made to stab him. But even as his muscles had tensed, another thought had flashed across his mind and caused him to desist. Apparently, Ramirez had not seen him, and Benton withdrew to think the matter over. It seemed improbable that the halfbreed's presence on the boat was a mere coincidence, and Benton's face wore a worried expression as he told the boys of the encounter.

"The chances are that he found out in some way that I was taking passage on this ship and joined the crew in the hope of stealing the map which he knows that I always carry with me," concluded Benton. "From now on we must all be on the alert, for he will know that you are with me and may suspect each one of having a copy of the map. So watch your step and keep away from dark places on the deck after nightfall."

For the rest of the trip, the boys kept their eyes open, but the halfbreed made no hostile move, and for a time they believed that Benton must have mistaken his man. Life on shipboard followed the usual routine and the boys made many friends among the passengers.

With their knowledge of radio, they also got in the good graces of the radio operators on board ship, and once Phil stood an entire watch in the radio room, receiving and sending messages in a way that evoked the unqualified admiration of the professionals.

One message that came during that watch illustrated again the beneficient properties of radio. Word came from a town on the shore where an accident had happened to one of the workmen erecting a sugar mill. There was no doctor at hand and the superintendent of the mill sent out a radio call for help that Phil caught. He summoned the ship's doctor, and at his dictation told the superintendent just what to do in order to save the man's life. The interchange of messages lasted for over an hour and when the doctor arose from his chair it was with the information that his orders had been followed to the letter, and that the patient was resting easily with every prospect of complete recovery.

Radio concerts also were held in the salon of the steamer, and helped to beguile the time most pleasantly. The hours passed quickly until one day a speck appeared on the horizon that grew into an island as they approached it and a few hours later the ship had dropped anchor in San Domingo.

CHAPTER X

Lurking in the Shadows

Early the next day they set out in search of a suitable craft for their expedition. It was no easy task to find what they wanted, but at last they chanced on a trig little sloop, of which after considerable bargaining and red tape they became the proud owners. All this was not accomplished without the passage of many days, and while Benton was interviewing ship owners and harbor masters, the boys employed the time in mastering the mysteries of the diver's art.

Benton had looked up the old diver that he had previously spoken about to the boys, and had little difficulty in getting him to agree to give the boys practical lessons in his profession. So thoroughly did he do his part that in a little while the boys became proficient enough to feel that they could get along reasonably well in the shallow waters in which they supposed the wreck to be lying.

Of course the old fellow who instructed them was somewhat curious, but he was being well paid for his trouble, and was not in the habit

of worrying much about other people's plans. By the time the craft was provisioned and in shape for the voyage, the boys felt at home in the greenish depths and were looking forward impatiently to the time when they could put their newly acquired knowledge to use.

At length all was in readiness, and when they went ashore one night their eyes were shining with excitement, for with the dawn they were to start on the voyage after the treasure. But as they left the dock and walked toward the hotel, first one and then another became uneasy, for no apparent reason. Phil especially felt unmistakably the impression of being followed, and more than once he glanced uneasily over his shoulder.

They were in a poor section of the town, the narrow streets being lighted only at rare intervals by a flickering oil lamp. Not a soul was to be seen following them, but nevertheless the feeling of being dogged clung to them, and refused to be shaken off. At length Phil's keen eyes made out a skulking figure just diving into a black patch of shadow, and at his warning word they all stopped.

"If you're sure you saw someone following us, we'll turn back and see who it was," said Benton, and, suiting the action to the word, he started for the black shadow at top speed, the others close at his heels. But he had hardly

gone ten steps, when something whizzed past his head and struck with a sharp ring against the wall of a house that he was passing. At the same time could be heard the swift beat of retreating footsteps, and Benton pulled up short.

"No use chasing the fellow," he said. "In these dark alleys we'd never find him, and likely enough we'd get a knife through our ribs for our trouble. That was a knife that fellow threw, and it just grazed my head."

He groped on the ground, and presently found the knife. It was long and deadly sharp, and on the handle were two initials—"P. R."

"It doesn't require much guessing to tell whom that knife belongs to," said Benton, grimly. "Those initials stand for Pasquale Ramirez, the murdering hound!"

"No doubt of it," agreed Phil, soberly. "You had a narrow escape, Jack. The sooner we get out of this town and on the clean blue ocean the better I'll like it."

"Well, it won't be long now, thank goodness!" said Dick. "To-morrow we sail for the Spanish Main, and leave that dirty halfbreed here. This town seems just made for sneaking dogs like him."

They hurried along the dark and winding streets, until they reached the better quarter of the city, and eventually their hotel. But here another unpleasant surprise awaited them.

When they left that morning all their belongings had been neatly packed, but now they were strewn wildly about the rooms. With exclamations of astonishment and anger they gathered the things together and compared notes to see what was missing.

Fortunately they had left nothing of great value in their rooms, and the map and papers Benton always carried on his own person. None of their clothing had been taken, and at first they were somewhat at a loss to understand the motive of the outrage, but Phil soon supplied the clue.

"This couldn't have been the work of an ordinary thief," he said. "The man who did this job was looking for something special—something that he knows we have and that he wants badly. It looks to me as though Ramirez had gotten into our rooms someway, ransacked our trunks, and then, when he was convinced that we must have the map with us, he laid for us when we came off the boat."

"That's about the size of it, I guess," nodded Benton. "Well he got fooled both ways, but I only wish I could get my hands on him! He wouldn't bother us again for some time to come, I promise you!"

Judging from the working fingers and flashing eyes of their friend that probably in that case the halfbreed would never bother anybody

again, the boys were silent for a few minutes. Then, as there seemed little immediate prospect of meting out punishment to the rascal, they set about repacking their belongings, and making ready for the early start in the morning.

The Fleeting, as they had named their boat, looked very neat and businesslike as they rowed out to her, and the adventure of the previous evening was forgotten as they gazed at her trim lines and felt a freshening wind that kicked up a thousand sparkling waves on the gleaming water. With shout and laughter they climbed aboard, where breakfast awaited them, prepared by the faithful Bimbo. He said he was a good cook, and that meal fully justified his claims. Then they rushed upon deck, hoisted the sails, and lifted the anchor. The sloop headed into the freshening breeze, and chopped through the water at a pace that spoke well for sailing qualities. In a few hours the land had faded into a distant speck, and then disappeared altogether.

Benton was at the wheel, and he gazed aloft at the trim sails and taut cordage with pride and exultation. Soon the wind veered a few points and came more abeam, and the vessel heeled over and fairly hissed through the water, her lee scuppers dipping under every now and again as an especially strong gust caught the sails. The boys enjoyed the rush and heave of the vessel

as it rose to the long swells, riding them easily and throwing showers of spray from the sharp bows. The tang of the salt breeze was more exhilirating than wine, and they shouted and sang as their craft raced along toward her goal.

For a time they headed due south, but later veered to a more westerly course. For the first day or two the weather held fair, and they covered many miles of sparkling blue sea, all the time keeping a sharp lookout for an island like the one described in the old Spaniard's papers.

At night they hovered about in circles under easy sail, as they did not want to run the risk of passing it in the darkness. In a few days they had reached the approximate latitude and longitude indicated on the map, but although they saw many islands, none of them appeared to answer the description of the one they were looking for. At first this did not greatly disappoint them, as they knew the old map was not likely to be very accurate. What bothered them more than anything else was the increasing cloudiness of the weather, and the falling barometer. Every indication pointed to a coming storm, and Benton lost no time in preparing for it. He and the boys double reefed the mainsail, and securely lashed everything to the deck that they could not carry below. They worked fast, for the gloom deepened every moment, and the

breeze, which had been fresh all the morning, died down to a dead calm, leaving the sails idly flapping.

The western sky was black as night, except when it was rent by darting forks of lightning. At times they could hear the dull mutterings of thunder, and Benton's face wore a worried frown as he gazed over the livid green ocean toward the approaching storm. From experience he knew how fierce were the sudden tempests that sweep over the Caribbean Sea, and he had never seen one that looked more threatening than that now brewing.

Suddenly the sails flapped a few seconds, and then dropped limp again. From the distance they heard a faint whistling sound, that grew rapidly louder, and then they could see a white line of hissing foam sweeping over the water and approaching them at terrific speed.

"Stand by to let the mainsheet run!" yelled Benton, but even as the boys sprang to obey, the wind was upon them. It struck with apalling force, and the Fleeting heeled over—further and further, until the deck slanted down at a sharp angle to the boiling waters, and the boys had to hang on to ropes and stays to keep from sliding down the steep incline.

It was a terrible moment, while their lives hung in the balance. A little further, and the Fleeting would surely have capsized, but just at

the second when this seemed inevitable, the first furious gust of wind abated a trifle, and their craft slowly righted herself, while the wind whistled and shrieked in her rigging.

Benton had managed to retain his place at the wheel, and as the gallant little craft picked up steerage way, he headed her into the wind and the rising sea. At the first stroke of the raging gale the ocean was covered with spume crested waves, and lashed by its fury, they mounted higher and higher, until the ocean was an endless succession of mountainous rollers, bearing down hungrily on the devoted little ship, as though eager to batter and overwhelm her. Great waves thundered down over her bows, raced aft, and carried away everything movable on the deck. It was only by dint of clinging desperately to ropes that at such times the boys avoided being swept overboard.

The Fleeting was tossed about like a chip in the tremendous welter of waters, and Benton soon saw that he could not hold a course into the wind. His only alternative was the run before it, and he shouted to the boys to lower the mainsail. They could not hear him above the noise of the storm, but they knew from his gestures what he wanted.

To get the mainsail down and furled, even though it was reefed, was a gigantitc task, but the boys tackled it bravely, and after a pro-

tracted struggle amid flying spray and wildly lashing canvas, they got the sail snugly stowed. Then Benton let the bows fall off before the wind, and soon they were scudding along at a furious rate with the wind astern.

Their staunch little craft rode easier on this course, her stern rising high in air as a mountainous sea lifted it, while her bows slanted dizzily down into the green depths ahead. Then, in the full grip of the big comber, she would go shooting forward, the water boiling and hissing along her sides, until the wave had spent its force and passed on. The sea presented a terrible aspect, and when Bimbo staggered on deck with a potfull of steaming coffee that in some mysterious fashion he had managed to make, his dusky face turned a dull ashen hue.

CHAPTER XI

The Wrath of the Storm

For a few minutes his eyes rolled wildly as he viewed the tumbling waste of waters, but he soon overcame his dismay far enough to stagger over to Benton with the pot of coffee. The boys made their way to the same place, and the hot black liquid gave them renewed courage. Then the negro darted back to his galley, and presently reappeared with a tin pail full of sandwiches, which he sheltered from the spray under his ragged coat. These the boys thankfully devoured, after which they felt in better shape to face the perils of the night that was now falling rapidly over the tossing waste.

Benton had hoped that the storm would exhaust itself almost as quickly as it had arisen, but, on the contrary, as night fell it seemed to increase in fury. It was a fearsome thing to see the pale sheen of a great roller looming up over the stern, and the boys would hold their breaths, expecting every second to have some watery mountains come crashing down on their little craft and carry it to the bottom. At times

great seas did come aboard, entirely engulfing them until the ship shook itself free and rose, shuddering, to the next blow.

Through it all Benton clung doggedly to the wheel, half smothered by the flying surges, but sticking gamely to his post. Phil fought his way aft at last, and offered to relieve him, but Benton refused to give up the wheel.

"I'll hang on a while longer," he yelled, "You go forward into the bows, Phil, and keep a lookout. Heaven only knows where we're driving to, and it will be a miracle if we miss some of the reefs and islands around here. All I can do is keep us headed before the waves, and leave the rest to Providence."

Phil shouted a few words of encouragement, which it is doubtful if Benton heard above the fiendish uproar of the storm, and groped his way forward, clutching desperately at anything that came to hand to keep from being swept overboard. Most of the rail had been demolished, so that there was nothing to save any of them from being swept over the side if they once lost their hold on some securely fastened object.

At length Phil reached the bows, and wedged himself in between the side and the capstan, straining his eyes through the inky blackness. Soon it began to rain in torrents, but this made little difference to any of the party, as they were

already soaked to the skin and had been for many hours.

Swept by rain and sea, and almost deafened by the howling of the wind, Phil peered ahead, striving to pierce the murky darkness. Long ridges of white foam hissed by, so close that he could dip his hand in as the bow dropped into some boiling eddy. High above all else rose the booming and whistling of the wind, and this kept him from hearing an even greater sound until suddenly he saw a huge spout of foam not a hundred feet ahead of the ship, and at the same time heard the menacing roar of breakers.

With a shout that was lost in the uproar of the elements, he sprang to his feet and raced aft, forgetful of the seas washing across the deck. But by the time he reached Benton, the latter had also seen the ominous spout of foam, and the roar of the reef was loud in their ears as they drove toward it under the pitiless urge of sea and gale. To change their course was out of the question then, and their only hope lay in driving through some passage in the reef.

Now the reef was almost under their bows, and they all held their breath, waiting for the shock that seemed inevitable. On every side great waves leaped and hammered on the reef, spouting fifty feet into the air in sheets of foam that fell back booming onto the deck of the vessel. The surf was tremendous beyond descrip-

tion, and the Fleeting was picked up and whirled about like a toy. A giant roller reared its crest over them, picked them up in its mighty grasp, and hurled them toward the spouting inner reef.

With a crashing impact the vessel struck—shivered—rose—and struck again, with a sickening crunch of riven timbers. Then with the last of its expiring strength the tremendous wave smashed them clear over the reef, while a flood of roaring water tore everything living from the decks and hurled them toward the beach some three hundred feet distant.

Lucky it was for them that they were all strong swimmers. Battered and dazed, they found themselves in the lesser surf that beat upon a sandy beach, and after a desperate, choking struggle, Phil and Benton dragged themselves out upon the sand. A pale dawn was glimmering in the east, and by the sickly light they could make out black dots still struggling in the raging surf, and they knew that these must be their comrades. Almost exhausted themselves, they hesitated not a moment, but rushed back into the combing waves and deadly undertow to rescue the others.

Time and again they were swept from their feet and had to struggle desperately to regain the beach. The first one they pulled out was Dick, and, although more dead than alive, he immediately turned to and helped. Tom came

next, still swimming feebly, but overwhelmed again and again by the breaking waves. There remained then only Bimbo, who could not swim, but was clinging desperately to a floating spar. As often as a wave washed him toward shore, the powerful undertow drew him out again, and he was fast weakening under the strain.

Under Benton's directions they all joined hands, thus forming a living chain, and then battled their way into the surf once more. Phil was the outermost, and as the negro was swept shoreward on a big breaker, Phil stretched out a hand to him. The faithful darky just managed to grasp the outstretched hand as the undertow caught the spar and sucked it seaward. With a tremendous effort Benton, who was nearest the beach, exerted all his remaining strength, and they all staggered shoreward out of the inferno of breaking waves and clutching undertow. With a final desperate effort they shook themselves clear, and dropped, panting and exhausted, onto the wet sand of the beach.

For some time they lay scarcely able to move, but at length their strength began to return, and they struggled to their feet and took note of their surroundings.

Some hundred yards from the beach lay the wreck of their vessel. When it had struck the reef the mast had gone overboard, and the erstwhile trim ship was now a melancholy sight, with

the waves breaking over her deck at short intervals. Fortunately, the outer reef broke the force of the rollers, so that the ship seemed in no immediate danger of smashing up, and they resolved to get as many of her stores as possible ashore as soon as the storm abated. But at present there was little they could do in that quarter, and they turned their attention to the island upon which they were stranded.

The beach was perhaps a hundred yards wide. At its landward edge were low sand hills covered with coarse grass, and beyond this rose the tall trees and tangled creepers of a dense jungle. Beyond this again the land rose steeply into a series of ridges, and as the little party gazed the same idea seemed to strike them all at the same time, and they looked at each other in startled wonder. Was it possible that an adverse Fate was relenting toward them?

Without a word Benton drew the old Spaniard's map from the waterproof belt in which he always carried it, and they eagerly compared it with the jagged outlines before them. There were the same peaks before their eyes that the old pirate had seen and noted two hundred years before, and as they traced the unmistakable similarity the boys gave a shout of exultation. By what seemed little short of a miracle they had been cast upon Sawtooth Island!

But after their first feeling of exultation had

passed, they realized that they would be as well off on any other island, unless, indeed, they could salvage some of their diving apparatus from the sunken vessel. Their immediate need was food and shelter, and without loss of time they set themselves to finding both. Thousands of clams and mussels had been thrown up on the beach, and they each gathered a quantity of these and ate them raw. Then, feeling much stronger, they set out to look for some kind of shelter from the heavy tropical rain that was still falling in torrents. There was obviously no shelter on the beach, so they approached the forest that hemmed it on three sides.

But when they reached the belt of dense vegetation, they were met by such a tangle of vines and undergrowth as defied penetration without the aid of knives and axes. They skirted slowly along the edge, looking for some opening, and at length Bimbo's roving eyes detected the merest trace of a path through the trees.

"Dar's a place we kin get in!" he shouted, and raced for the opening. But when he reached it he very prudently waited for the others to arrive before he ventured in.

They had to walk single file, and even at that it was slow going, as the path was encumbered by fallen trees, and great vines were festooned across it like ropes, and they had to duck under these to make any progress at all. They

had almost decided to give it up for the present and return to the beach, when suddenly the path widened out into a small clearing, and they stopped to look about them.

At one edge of the clearing towered a pile of great boulders, rising so steeply that even the rank jungle vegetation had not been able to lodge on them. At the base of this granite mass there was a heavy growth of bushes and creepers, but from experience the boys knew that where there were rocks there was very apt to be a cave, and their need of shelter was urgent, as they had not had dry clothing on them for almost twenty-four hours, and were chilled to the bone.

They approached the rocks, and searched for some sign of a crevice that might protect them from the sullen tropical downpour.

Phil was the first to meet with success. As he tore up a big bush by the roots, he could see a black opening in the rock, and his shout brought the others to the spot.

CHAPTER XII

Shipwrecked

"That looks promising," said Benton. "Let's explore it and see if it amounts to anything," and suiting the action to the word, he dropped to his knees and crawled into the narrow passage, that was barely wide enough to admit his broad shoulders. The others followed close behind, all except Bimbo, who preferred to wait in the open air.

"Dere's no tellin' whut kind ob a conjur dere may be in dat place, an' Ah 'lows Ah'll stay outside," he declared, with chattering teeth, and no amount of persuasion could get him to follow the others.

For their part, they were willing to risk worse things than 'conjurs' to find a place where they could dry out, and they had not gone far when their persistence was rewarded. After about twenty feet the narrow passage widened out into a roomy cave, with a floor of hard dry sand. A faint light trickled down through some opening above, so that they could dimly make out the interior. In one corner were the remains

of a rude stone fireplace, and the little party were delighted with their discovery. There were even a few sticks of wood lying beside the fireplace, rotted and crumbling, but ideal material for starting a fire. Luckily Benton had a small waterproof box of matches on his person, and in a few minutes they had a fire snapping and crackling in the ancient fireplace. It flickered and danced on the rough stone walls, casting grotesque shadows as they all crowded about it and absorbed some of its welcome warmth. Phil went back to fetch Bimbo, and after much persuasion got him to enter the narrow passage. The negro's eyes rolled as he saw the red glint of the fire at the further end, but Phil had craftily made him go first, so that there was no chance to retreat. But when he finally reached the big cave, which was already filled with the cheery warmth from the fire his fear changed suddenly to joy, and he capered about, executing impromptu jig steps and clapping his hands.

"Ef Ah only had somethin' heah to cook, A'd turn you geemmen out a meal dat would make you hair curl, yessah, dat Ah would," he declared, with an expansive smile.

"Yes, and if we only had some ham, we could make some nice ham sandwiches if we had some bread," said Tom, sarcastically.

"Yessah, dat we could," agreed Bimbo, utterly missing the sarcasm, to Tom's great dis-

gust. "Specs we'll have to tote some outn de old ship when de storm done goes down."

"Yes, I don't think it will take me long to get sick of clams as a steady diet," agreed Phil. "But we're lucky to have a dry place like this. Br-r-r! I never knew it could be so cold in this part of the world."

"Wait until the sun comes out, and you'll wonder how you could ever have felt cold," Benton assured him. "This isn't half bad, though," he continued. "We'll make this place our headquarters, and sleep here at night. We can easily block the entrance and make it safe against any intruders."

"I don't imagine there's anybody on this island to bother us, is there?" inquired Steve, in some surprise.

"That's an open question," said Benton. "These islands are often visited by savage natives, and we can't afford to take any chances. In fact, somewhere in his papers the old Spaniard mentions some such visit, if you'll remember."

Steve nodded, and they all agreed to use every precaution against surprise. By this time their clothes were beginning to dry out, and they felt very sleepy and comfortable. The smoke from the fire drifted up to the roof and disappeared through an opening there, leaving the air below comparatively clear. When their

clothes were quite dry, they rolled a couple of big rocks across the entrance to the cave, and then, scooping out hollows in the soft dry sand, they lay down and were soon fast asleep.

Phil was awakened by a shaft of brilliant sunlight that pierced down through the opening in the roof and glided over the sandy floor until it reached his eyes. He leaped to his feet, and the others, awakened by his action, sat up, yawning and rubbing their eyes.

"Hooray!" shouted Tom. "The sun's shining again, so the storm must be over."

"How did you ever guess it?" grinned Phil, and made for the entrance, followed by the others.

They stepped into a different world from the one they had left the previous evening. Brilliant sunlight trickled down through the thick foliage, rousing joy in the breasts of countless birds, who flitted about among the branches like living rainbows, so gaudy was their plumage. The boys rushed down to the beach, and gazed anxiously for their vessel. Had it been destroyed during the night they would have been in a sorry plight indeed, but on the contrary it had survived the pounding of the waves, which had only succeeded in forcing it closer to the beach. The tide was also low, and had the little vessel not been canted at such an angle, they might have imagined that it was still afloat. The surf still

roared on the outer reef, but the wind had disappeared, and the water about the Fleeting had scarcely a ripple upon it.

"Things might be a lot worse," declared Benton. "One of us will have to swim out to the wreck, and either get one of the boats, or make a raft, if they've all been smashed."

"It doesn't look like much of a swim," said Dick. "I could make it in fifteen minutes."

"The swim doesn't amount to much," agreed Benton. "Don't forget, though, that these waters are full of sharks, and its dangerous to venture more than a few feet from the beach. I suggest that we all draw lots to see who goes."

"I'll take a chance," declared Phil, and before they could stop him he had thrown off his coat and shoes and was in the water. He used a fast crawl stroke that took him through the water at surprising speed, but none the less his friends on shore watched his progress anxiously, and heaved sighs of relief when they saw him seize a trailing rope and haul himself up on deck.

Once there, he found everything in a terrible state of devastation. The deck was strewn with wreckage. The after deck house had been swept away entirely, while the forward one was badly damaged. But by great good fortune a large quantity of food that was stored here, where the galley had also been, was almost undamaged.

Phil caught up a handful of sea biscuits from a big tin, and munched them ravenously while he explored further.

All the boats but one had been swept away, and even this one had two planks stove in near the bow. But Phil got hammer and saw out of the carpenter's chest, and after two hours of hard work had the boat patched up so that it would float. The boat was a servicable twenty foot dory, and Phil felt thankful that it had survived the general disaster.

After great exertion he contrived to get the boat into the water, and then proceeded to load it with provisions, together with a few tools from the chest. The improvised repair leaked slightly, but Phil soon had all that he cared to transport at one load, and set out for the beach. A cheer greeted him as the bow grated on the sand, and they all fell ravenously on the food that he had brought.

After their appetites had been satisfied, they all piled into the boat except Bimbo, who was detailed to carry the supplies to the cave. Once on board the Fleeting they set about salvaging everything that they could. They found the diving apparatus undamaged, and to their surprise and unbounded delight they discovered that the radio outfit had not been destroyed, although of course it was soaked and required much drying out before it would be serviceable again. For-

tunately the batteries had been located in a rack quite high up on the wall, and the vessel had settled in such shallow water that the sea had not reached them.

They carried the diving apparatus and radio set on deck, and loaded it into the dory. This made a pretty heavy load for the damaged boat, and they were unable to carry anything else on that trip. But on succeeding journeys they took ashore food, clothing, and other much needed supplies, until by nightfall their cave was stocked with enough provisions to last them a month if necessary.

The possession of the radio set filled them with delight, for with it they knew that they could get in touch with civilization and summon help should they need it. They carried the outfit to the cave, where Bimbo had prepared a supper worthy of the appetites they brought to it. After supper they set themselves to drying out the induction coils, variometers, and other parts of the apparatus before the fire. When they reflected what a change for the better the last twenty four hours had wrought, they felt encouraged and hopeful of the future.

"To-morrow we'll spend getting off the rest of the stores," proposed Benton, "and then we can turn our attention to locating the treasure. We'll caulk the dory and make it perfectly tight, and then we'll try to rig up the diving apparatus

in it, although I'm afraid it will be rather small."

"I've been thinking about that," said Phil. "And I'm pretty sure that we'll never be able to carry on diving operations from the dory. It seems to me we'd do better to build a big raft, and mount the apparatus on that. We could tow it out through the passage in the reef easily enough."

"That sounds like a crackerjack idea to me," said Dick, enthusiastically, and the others agreed with him. So it was decided to try out this plan as soon as they got all the supplies off the Fleeting that they would be likely to require.

The construction of the raft was a difficult operation, but at last they had it finished, and Phil and Benton embarked in the dory to go on a hunt for the wreck, while the others attended to mounting the windlass on the raft.

CHAPTER XIII

Under the Sea

In the boat they had installed the radio apparatus necessary for locating submerged objects, together with a log to be used as a buoy attached to a long length of cord. The purpose of this was to mark the site of the wreck if they should be so fortunate as to locate it.

Benton, who was rowing the boat, was skeptical over Phil's radio outfit, and did not hesitate to express his doubts.

"I know you've tried to explain the business to me, Phil," he said, "but I'm blest if I understand it yet. How do you figure to locate that wreck with radio waves?"

"It's not so complicated as it seems," said Phil. "This set is equipped with unusually sensitive vacuum tubes, and with certain condenser arrangements, radio waves affected by metal deposits are received through the water. Now, in the receivers of this set I can hear the incoming radio waves, and the second that they vary in strength I know that we are near some large

quantity of metal. That's simple enough, isn't it?"

"Well, yes, but this was a wooden ship, remember," objected Benton.

"Yes, but if it's the one we are after, there is plenty of metal aboard," said Phil. "Yellow metal—gold, in other words, as well as anchors, windlass and other metals."

"I only hope you're right," said the other, still a little doubtfully. "We must be pretty close to the location now, if the old Spaniard didn't have his facts twisted."

Phil was listening intently to the message conveyed by his earphones, at times adjusting his condensers to get the maximum strength. Still there was no perceptible change in the intensity of sound, and Phil's face began to wear a worried look, while Benton grew more and more skeptical.

"The old fellow says in his papers that the ship had barely cleared the reef when it sank," said Phil at last. "Perhaps it went further than he thought, Jack. Let's try it out a little further."

The other bent to his oars, and they zigzaged away from the reef, drawing out toward the open sea. Suddenly the sounds in the receivers became softer for a few seconds, but then resumed their former tone.

"Back water, Jack!" exclaimed Phil. "Some-

thing happened just then, as though we were skirting along the edge of something down there."

With renewed energy Benton pushed the boat back over its path, and sure enough, in a few seconds the sounds faded. With his hands Phil motioned to turn to the right, but then the signals became loud again, so he hurriedly motioned to the left. This time he was evidently on the right track, for the sounds grew steadily fainter until he could hardly hear them, and then increased as they kept on rowing.

"Back water just a little way, Jack!" said Phil excitedly, and seized the buoy with its attached anchor. This time, as the signals faded out to almost nothing, he dropped the buoy anchor with a splash, and snatched the earphones from his head.

"We've located something, all right!" he exclaimed, as he swtiched off the battery. "It may not be the wreck we're after, of course, but I'll bet anything that it's *some* wreck."

"You row and let me listen," said Benton, so Phil took the oars while the other put on the headphones. As Phil rowed toward the buoy, Benton heard the signals diminish just as they had before, and for the first time seemed really convinced that Phil's radio was a practical proposition.

"Back we go for the diving apparatus, then,"

he said eagerly. "It's early yet, and if they've got it ready we can make a descent before dark."

Phil was as anxious as he, and they both took a pair of oars and made a record trip back to the beach. When the others saw them coming at such a pace they surmised that their trip had been successful, and even before they landed were shouting questions at them.

Phil told them briefly what they had discovered, and they were all eagerness to go out with the raft. It was an ideal day for diving operations, with a calm sea and no sign of a cloud in the sky so, as the apparatus was all rigged on the raft, they started forthwith.

It was slow work towing the cumbrous raft, and seemed all the more slow on account of their impatience to arrive at the scene of operations. But after an hour's backbreaking toil they located the buoy, and were soon anchored alongside it.

Phil would not hear of anybody going down ahead of him, so he donned the heavy suit, with helmet and lead weighted shoes. Then they tried out the windlass to make sure that it was working properly, and at Phil's signal they lowered him over the side of the raft.

The water was not cold, and he hardly felt its chill as he was lowered into the translucent depths.

The diving suit that he was using was on

the model of that which Benton had recommended when they were laying their plans for the cruise, but on a smaller scale and of lesser weight than the kind designed for greater depths.

As Phil descended steadily the pressure increased, and diminished somewhat the intensity of the lights that were attached to his suit. In a short time his feet were on the sandy bottom. Strange but beautiful plants grew on the ocean floor, while queer fish floated before the heavy glass windows of his helmet.

He had not progressed far when there loomed before him the hulk of an old ship, and Phil moved toward it with the grip of great excitement at his heart. So far his radio had not deceived him. Here was the sunken ship that it had indicated. But was it the right one? That only exploration could tell.

Phil had landed some distance in front of its bows, and they rose high above his head, precluding the possibility of boarding the wreck at that point. Phil moved slowly along the side, and found that the high bows swept sharply down toward the waist. It was easy to see that the ship was of an ancient type, and Phil's heart beat faster as he noted this and the fact that the heavy timbers had partly rotted away, indicating a great length of time under water.

He reached the middle of the old vessel and here had little difficulty in clambering aboard.

Once more a man stood on the old deck that centuries ago had been teeming with life and had known the hot suns of many seas. Now sunk in the still depths of the ocean and half buried in sand, it had an inexpressibly mournful appearance, and it seemed almost sacrilege to disturb that age-old quiet.

He must have yielded to the spell cast upon him much longer than he had thought, for he was recalled from them by a sudden feeling of oppression, and with a start he realized that his air was rapidly becoming close and unbreathable. He had only taken a limited supply of oxygen in his tank for this preliminary survey, which he figured would take him but a short time. Still he was not greatly worried, and he gave a sharp tug at the line by which he had been let down. There was no response. And then with a sinking of the heart he realized that the line must have been fouled on some part of the wreck.

There was no time to lose and he set about instantly to find where the cable was caught. It was not long before he discovered that it had been caught by the projecting stump of the bowsprit. This was high above his head, and already he was suffering from the first pangs of suffocation. He realized that unless he freed himself in a minute or two he would be too far

gone to help himself and would perish miserably in the cold, green depths.

Summoning the last of his strength, he struggled up hand over hand toward the tangle that seemed so far away. By dint of sheer will power he reached it at last. Black spots were floating before his eyes and it seemed as though his laboring lungs must burst, but he finally succeeded, and as he gave a tug at the freed line consciousness left him.

When he came to, bright sunlight was in his eyes and delicious salt open air was entering his lungs. The anxious faces of his friends peered down at him, but when he opened his eyes they gave a cheer that startled the sea birds circling about overhead.

"Glory be!" exclaimed Benton, fervently. "We were just getting ready to dive for you as a last resort. What caught you?"

Phil briefly recounted what he had found, and the narrow escape he had experienced.

"But I'm all right now, and we've located the wreck," he concluded. "I haven't much doubt that it's the one we're looking for. But it's so covered with sand that the only way we'll ever be able to get at the inside is to blow it open."

"Well, old man, dynamite is a fast worker," said Benton. "I wish we had brought some with us on the raft, but I guess we've done

enough for to-day, anyway. You must have had enough underwater experience for one day, Phil."

"If we had the dynamite here, I'd go down again right now," declared Phil. "Only this time I'd keep a closer watch on the line. I got so interested in the wreck that I forgot it for a time."

They were all jubilant over the certainty that they had the wreck located, and pulled back to the beach in high spirits. Had it been a little earlier they would have gone out again, but the afternoon was waning, and besides the sky had become overcast and there were indications of a coming storm. So they reluctantly decided to posttpone operations for the day, and repaired to the cave. The evening was spent in excited discussion of the day's happenings and plans for the morrow, and they were up early the following morning to put them into execution.

What was their disappointment to find a heavy wind blowing with a rough sea breaking against the outer reef. Obviously there was nothing to be done but wait until the wind and sea subsided, and in the meantime they decided to explore the island.

CHAPTER XIV

The Tentacles of the Devil-Fish

Armed with keen knives and axes, they chopped a way through the dense jungle growth, finding that it thinned out as they mounted the steep ridges that formed the center of the island. Here the going was easier, and in a few hours they had reached the summit of the highest peak. From here they had a wide view of the far flung expanse of waters. To the west they thought they could descry land, but in every other direction the ocean stretched unbroken to the horizon.

What claimed their greatest attention, however, was the fact that the mountain they were on was evidently of volcanic origin. The sides were seamed with ridges and gulleys of hardened lava, and when they advanced a little further they found themselves gazing down into a deep crater. There was a sulphurous smell in the air, and near the bottom they could see what looked like jets of steam issuing from the rocks. It was not reassuring to learn that they were stranded on a volcanic island, but they reflected

that the volcano, if it had not in centuries destroyed the island, was not likely to bother them now.

They descended the mountain in a direction that would bring them to the coast a considerable distance from their cave, as the going was easier in that direction. Eventually they came out on a strip of beach that was separated from theirs by a strip of jungle. This beach, however, was different from theirs. It was backed up by a rocky wall, in which the action of the waves had hollowed out great caves. When they reached the beach it was low tide, but they judged that it was probably entirely covered at flood.

"Let's explore the caves," proposed Dick, and they headed for the largest of these. It was a great, echoing cavern, from which other smaller caves opened, where the ocean had eaten out the soft spots in the stone. In some of these caves lay great pools of water left by the receding tide, some of them so deep that the boys could not touch bottom even with the long sticks they carried.

Dick was seated on the edge of one of these pools tying a loose shoelace, while the others had wandered off to explore other caves. He was leaning over, intent upon his task, when something cold and slimy suddenly encircled his neck, and he felt himself being drawn toward

the water by an irresistible force. At the same time another snake like tentacle encircled his body, pinning his arms to his sides.

Dick struggled frantically and shouted wildly for the others to come to his assistance.

They were some distance off, but heard his cries, and rushed to the rescue. They arrived not a moment too soon. Dick was just being drawn beneath the water when they arrived, and took in the situation at a glance.

"A devil-fish has got him" shouted Benton, and without a pause they all leaped into the deadly pool. Their feet landed on something soft and pulpy, and they were surrounded in an instant by a maze of tentacles feeling for a grip.

But they were armed with their sharp hatchets and they hacked desperately at the slimy tentacles, each of which was provided with a row of suckers for fastening upon its prey. The pool was lashed into foam as the boys cut and slashed at the two big tentacles that held Dick. The octopus fought fiercely, but there were too many against it. No other prey that it had ever seized had stood a chance but these strange enemies who wielded flashing steel were evidently in a different class. One after another they hacked off the writhing feelers, until none appeared above the surface of the water. Then they all climbed out onto the slippery rock, where

Dick was seated half dazed by the horror of his experience.

"That was a close call, old fellow," said Phil. "It's luck we were within hailing distance. How did the devil fish get hold of you?"

Dick told him, and then got somewhat shakily to his feet. "I've heard that an octupus will grow new tentacles in place of those he loses, and I'm going to see that this fellow doesn't have a chance at anything again," said Dick.

"What's your idea?" asked Steve.

"Dynamite," replied Dick briefly. "You fellows stay here until I go to camp and get a stick. I'm feeling all right now."

In due time he arrived with a stick of explosive and a fuse. Benton showed him how to set the cap and fuse, and when all was ready they lighted the fuse and dropped the stick into the pool. Then they rushed out onto the sand and awaited developments.

In a few seconds there came a terrific explosion, and a cloud of water and steam rushed from the cave. After giving the air time to clear, they returned to the cave which had been the abode of the octopus. Over the walls and roof were scattered shreds of flabby flesh, all that remained of the lurking monster, while not a drop of water remained in the deep pool in which he had lain.

Even Dick could have asked no more com-

plete destruction of his enemy, and they set out for their cave well satisfied with the result of the adventure.

As they neared the cave, Phil stopped short in a listening attitude. The others also halted and looked at him inquiringly.

"I thought I heard a rifle shot," said Phil at length. "Did you fellows hear it too?"

"Guess you must be dreaming," chaffed Dick. "I didn't hear anything."

"Come out of your trance," jibed Steve.

"Guess it must have been the echo of that dynamite explosion," suggested Tom jocosely. "Who is there on this islanad to fire off a gun?"

"Of course it doesn't seem likely," returned Phil. "I thought I heard it, but I might have been mistaken."

They bantered him goodnaturedly, and Phil finally concluded that his ears might have played him false, and in the pressure of other matters the incident was forgotten.

CHAPTER XV

Torn Apart

The rough weather which had delayed their fascinating work of exploration continued for a day or two longer and the boys, impatient at the setback, were beginning to make plans to brave the heavy sea, when, as suddenly as it had risen, the wind died down, followed by a heavy, breathless calm.

"At last," muttered Dick as the boys stood shoulder to shoulder, gazing out over the placid water, "the elements are with us again. I had begun to think that wind would never die down."

"I imagine we'd better work fast too, if that overgrown hill is volcanic," said Tom, with a glance over his shoulder at the lowering mountain. "We don't want all our fun spoiled by an eruption."

"Our fun wouldn't be the only thing spoiled, I imagine," grinned Steve as they started back for their apparatus. "If that old Jumbo over there should take it into its head to get busy there wouldn't be enough of us left to send back to the folks."

Finding the slender shelter which they had erected when they had first been flung upon the island, insufficient to ward off the terrific storm winds that visited that part of the world, the boys had taken refuge in a huge cave, evidently dug out of the side of the mountain by countless attacks of the sea.

That it was ancient there could be no doubt. Also there were traces of human habitation. Someone had evidently dwelt there before them and the boys, as well as Jack Benton himself jumped to the conclusion that that someone had been no other than the marooned old pirate himself.

Of course it was possible that others had occupied the island since the time of the old buccaneer, but it was not at all likely. This small volcanic, desolated island, isolated from the outside world was not one to attract visitors.

Of course, as Tom pointed out, the cave might have sheltered some poor shipwrecked refugee washed ashore by the strong tide. But to this Phil raised the objection that the island was far from the beaten track of vessels and a ship must be blown far out of her course in order to approach these remote waters.

"Well," Steve had finished with a grin, "we might as well say this is the old pirate's cave. There's no one to contradict us anyway."

"I wish," Tom had said at this point, "the

treasure had been buried in this cave instead of at the bottom of the sea. It would have been a mighty sight more convenient."

"But not half the fun," Phil had added. "There's not everyone has a chance to say 'howdy' to sharks and other weird looking any-miles without being afraid the greeting will be his last. I just sit fast within that iron-bound diving suit and grin at 'em."

"You feel something like the cat the dog has treed, eh?" laughed Benton. "Let the dog bark and be durned to him."

"Exactly," grinned Phil. "It sure is a grand and glorious feeling."

Now as the boys returned to the cave they saw that Bimbo was working furiously at something. It was so remarkable for Bimbo to work hard at anything that the boys regarded him curiously.

"What's up, old boy?" shouted Phil when they came within calling distance. "Has a bee stung you or something?"

"Law, Marse Phil," the negro answered straightening up and showing all his teeth in a broad grin. "They ain't no sech a thing in dis part de world, not as Ah ever heered on. No sir, Marse Phil. Ah was jes' gettin' you' bref-fust ready in a tearin' hurry. The wind done gone an' lef' us an' I knowed you'd be wantin'

get busy right soon. So Ah says to myself, Ah says, 'Bimbo, you' stir yo legs, Nigger, yo done better get a wiggle on. Marse Phil done got one busy day befo' him.' So, Marse Phil, I jes' been followin' mah own advice."

By this time they had reached the cave and Phil gave the grinning black boy a resounding slap on the back.

"Good boy, Bimbo," he laughed. "You're getting better every day. I believe you know what we want before we want it ourselves."

Bimbo beamed at this praise and his eyes followed Phil with the faithful devotion of a dog. It is safe to say that the black boy would have died without a murmur for this adored young master.

The boys were full of enthusiasm and they ate the tempting food that Bimbo set before them hurriedly, hardly knowing what they ate.

One thing was uppermost in their minds—the lure of the treasure hidden beneath the hatches of the sunken ship.

"I'd better take some dynamite with me this time," said Phil, as he finished his last bite of breakfast and stood up, eager for action. "From the look I had at them the other day I don't believe I'll be able to lift the hatches by my own strength."

"All right, let's go," said Dick, energetically.

"The first thing is to get all our stuff down to the water. We'll want to take some of the radio apparatus I suppose."

"Sure thing," said Steve. "We'll need a couple of batteries anyway—enough to generate the spark that will set off the dynamite."

"We'll need to be mighty careful in using this stuff," cautioned Benton. "Dynamite works a great deal more powerfully under water than it does on land. It sure would be unhealthy for Phil if we didn't get him up and removed to a safe distance before the charge goes off. Playing safe is a good policy when you're dealing with such ticklish stuff as dynamite.

"Sure," said Phil, that charge won't be set off before we're at a safe distance. Everything ready fellows? All right, let's go."

Heavily-laden they got down to the water and piled the apparatus onto the stout raft. Then they got into the little dory and rowed as fast as they could with the cumbrous load in tow, out to the spot where radio had told them the sunken ship lay hidden.

Then Phil dooned the diving suit and, with several sticks of dynamite hugged carefully to his chest was slowly lowered over the side of the raft, down, down, down into the unexplored depths of the ocean.

As on that other time, he was filled with a

wild excitement. His heart beat thumpingly within the narrow confines of the diving suit. He felt a sort of awe at exploring the mysteries that were generally hidden from human eyes. This was indeed a different world into which he was being slowly lowered, a world filled with vivid-colored creatures which were strange to him.

Down and ever down—while the color and shape of these dwellers under the sea became more brilliant and bewildering. Distorted, grotesque shapes brushed past him to disappear into the shadows beyond the radius of the lights which flung their rays through the water.

As he sank deeper and the weight of the water increased, Phil noticed as he had done before how the radiance from these lights diminished, the rays seemingly thrown back upon themselves by the density of the water.

When at last his feet sank into the soft sand at the bottom of the sea, he could see only a little distance ahead of him.

"However, that distance would be enough," he told himself, thrilling with the thought of what he was about to do. He, Phil Strong alone at the bottom of the ocean with the treasure.

But perhaps, after all, there was no treasure. The thought chilled him. Suppose the gold they believed to be stored in the hatches of the sunken ship had only existed in the old pirate's imagina-

tion. Suppose they had come all this distance on a wild goose chase.

By a strong effort he shook off these thoughts. If they did not find gold, he told himself, at least they had had the adventure and he, for one, wouldn't have missed it for anything.

He found that the floating buoy must have shifted a little for he had not landed in the same spot as he had before. He had noticed particularly the formation of the coral beds as a guide to the hulk of the ship and now he found himself confronted by unfamiliar, though wonderfully beautiful coral rock.

He groped his way forward, moving as quickly as he could in the clumsy suit, retarded by the heavy pressure of the water. He knew by experience that the oxygen in the tank did not last long and so he must make the most of every moment when he could breathe without difficulty.

It was a nightmare sensation, groping there at the bottom of the sea, knowing the need for haste and yet being unable to hurry! The grotesque shapes of monster fish flashed by him and once a shark swam so close to him he could have touched it by reaching out the hooks that served him as hands.

He thought of what Jack Benton had said about the treed cat, but this time he did not

grin. He was too anxious to reach the ship before his supply of oxygen gave out.

And then before him, looming out of the shadows as gaunt and gray as a ghost was the hulk of the pirate ship. Phil gave a cry of joy and lumbered heavily forward.

Once the line that connected him with the upper world wound about a projection of rock and he wasted precious time trying to disengage it. It would never do to repeat that other experience of his. Once had been quite enough!

At last he reached the boat, clambered over the rail and tried to find footing on its slanting slippery deck. He half walked, half slid to the first hatch and tried vainly to pry it loose. Swollen by water, its hinges hopelessly rusted, it would take a force greater than Phil's to lift it.

Phil picked up the dynamite which he had carefully laid on the deck.

"It's up to you, old son," he said almost affectionately as he placed the charge close to the hatch and fastened to the fuse the wire which he had brought for the purpose. "You just get the hatches open and trust to Uncle Phil to do the rest!"

The work done, he gave the signal and was quickly drawn up to the surface. The boat put in for the shore and not until they were within a few yards of it did they halt. Then Benton pressed the key of the battery.

CHAPTER XVI

Wave-Tossed

A tremendous concussion, a muffled explosion that seemed to shake the bowels of the earth—then a spout of water shooting high into the air, a sight to inspire an awed and fearful wonder.

Removed as they were from the danger zone, the boys were yet near enough to feel some of the effects of the explosion. The tremendous incoming wave caught them on its crest and flung them high and dry upon the shore, then broke over them, rumbling onward.

Instinctively they dug their fingers and toes into the yielding sand, waiting for the outward rush of the water to pull them with it out into the turbulent sea.

It came, in tugging sucking volume, striving to break their hold—a smothering whirl of water. With all their might they fought to retain their hold upon the shifting sand—and won. Retiring with a defeated roar the great wave swung outward.

Gasping the boys rose to their feet and made

for the higher ground while a second wave, lesser than the first tagged at their heels.

"The boat," gasped Phil. "The raft—"

"Safe, Marse Phil," chattered the voice of Bimbo in his ear. "The wave done took 'em an' half buried 'em in de sand. Reckon we'll have to tug to get 'em out, yessir."

Phil followed the shaking black finger and there, sure enough, fifty feet away were the boat and the raft, half buried in wet sand. Miraculous as it seemed, the craft had been so deeply buried they had even resisted the tremendous tug of the outrushing waters.

"That's a stroke of luck," muttered Phil thankfully, then looked for his companions.

They were there, looking kind of white and shaken and staring as though fascinated out to sea. One wave had followed another, each smaller than the last, finally settling into a froth of white capped combers, a seething whirlpool of writhing waters.

"Say," remarked Steve with a shadow of his famous grin, "if you ask this old boy I'll say we sure stirred things up some. Who'd have guessed that that much dynamite would have made all that fuss?"

"It was a mighty pretty sight," said Tom, waxing enthusiastic now that the danger was passed. "A magnificent sight."

"And we ought to thank our stars we lived

to see it," said Dick dryly. "Say boys, what's become of the boats?"

Phil pointed them out and they went over to examine their contents and see how much loss there was—if any. They found that a couple of batteries had been swept overboard, but as they had more safe in the cave, this was not an important loss.

The diver's suit which Phil had removed before setting off the charge, had been thrown clear off the raft but it was so heavy that it had dug a hole for itself and lay there, distorted and grotesque like some monster thrown up from the sea.

"Lucky for us we didn't lose that," said Phil softly. "We'd have had a pretty time trying to get hold of the treasure without."

As though the word itself had some magic power the minds of the boys immediately returned to the hunt. As though moved by a single impulse, they turned and looked out to sea.

The tumultuous waters had quieted until now only a slight eddy and swirl marked the spot of the explosion.

"Safe enough now, I imagine," said Benton, answering the unspoken question of them all. "What do you say we put out again?"

"Aye, aye," cried Steve joyfully. "Can't be too soon to suit me. What are you doing, Phil."

"Trying to get into this suit again," replied Phil, his hands fumbling with his undersea armor. This rig is about as comfortable as a hair shirt."

"Mighty handy when the sharks come snooping around, just the same," laughed Jack Benton as he and Tom helped to adjust the clumsy suit.

"Oh I don't know," Phil's voice came muffled to them from inside the hideous head gear. "I'd just about as soon play around with a shark as this thing."

And how could he know that soon he would remember those words and under circumstances that would live with him in the form of nightmare for many years to come? Perhaps it was just as well that he didn't know!

Once more they put off from shore, Phil remaining on the raft eagerly impatient to descend once more to the ocean bed, to probe at last into the mysteries of the treasure ship. What would the dynamite-torn hulk reveal to him? He had hard work to keep his teeth from chattering with excitement.

"Steady now, Phil, old man," he heard Steve yell to him as he slipped over the side of the raft and felt the water gurgle up about him.

"Be sure you don't come up without a fistfull of gold," added Tom, and by way of response Phil shook a claw at them.

Slowly the water crept up to his lips, to his

eyes, and then he knew that he was fully submerged, moving downward, ever downward toward the open hatch.

That the hatch would be open he had not the slightest doubt. No hatch, however stout, could hope to withstand a force that had created a small tidal wave so many feet above it. The way would be open—for him to explore.

The descent seemed torturingly slow to his impatience. Once more bright-colored fish swam and swirled about him, bewildered, and yet attracted by the light from his lamps. Once more he felt as though this marvelous experience were a dream from which he must presently awake to find himself once more in the humdrum world of commonplaces.

And then at last, the touch of sand to his feet. The rope slackened. He was at the bottom.

This time they had judged the location better. He recognized the now familiar formation of the coral rock that lay near the wreck and with ever-increasing excitement he made for the ship.

His progress was a rather gruesome affair, hampered as it was by the bodies of dead fish, floating bellies up in a grotesquely helpless attitude.

The sharks and larger fish had suffered also and Phil was conscious of a creepy sensation

at the roots of his hair as a dead shark bumped against his legs.

"I don't like 'em alive," he muttered, evidently referring to the sharks. "But I don't like 'em even when they're dead."

Then he was stopped by an unusually unpleasant thought. What—beside possible treasure would he be likely to find within the shattered hulk of the old Sea Rover. The thought was enough to give anyone pause.

"If I hate dead fish," Phil communed with himself, "how much more will I hate dead—" he paused at the word and then went resolutely on again.

According to the old pirate the good ship had gone down with all hands on board and the pirate ships were always well manned. "Bricks and stones and dead men's bones—" Phil tried to laugh but he didn't get very far with it.

At that moment the hulk of the sunken ship loomed before him, but in spite of his eagerness for the treasure Phil's feet lagged. If only he could find the gold first—then, calling himself all sorts of names he started forward again, making the best speed he could toward the wreck.

"Don't be a fool," he said, briskly. "The fellows on the Sea Rover have been dead long enough not to mind my company. Their stolen money isn't doing anyone any good here at the bottom of the sea."

As he clambered to the slanting deck of the vessel it seemed to him that the oxygen in the tank was becoming exhausted but he soon discovered that it was only his excitement that caused his labored breathing.

As he stood balancing on the slippery deck he took in with a quick glance the work that the dynamite had done. No need to worry about the hatch now! The whole upper deck had been torn to shreds and the interior of the vessel yawned toward him, a dark gaping hole.

With a feeling of one who is venturing into the unknown, Phil strove to pierce the gloom in the depths of that strange vessel. What did the blackness hide from him?

CHAPTER XVII

An Uncanny Experience

Slowly, almost reluctantly, Phil lowered himself through the jagged aperture that had once been the deck of the ship. Without knowing what might be beneath him he let go his hold and dropped.

He landed heavily and, hampered by the suit, stretched himself full length on what he supposed to be the floor of the cabin. Flounderingly he got to his feet, the headlights throwing a weird radiance about him.

He looked about him and found, as he had supposed, that he was in a fairly good-sized cabin, probably that of the captain of the pirate ship. This would hardly be the place to look for the treasure but, deciding to overlook no chances, Phil prepared to make a thorough survey of the place.

It was a gruesome business, feeling about in that dark cabin, not knowing what awful thing the headlights might rest upon. But, on the other hand, suppose they should reveal a chest, containing a fortune of untold riches!

At the thought, Phil's breath quickened and he searched rapidly about the cabin, feeling with his hands where the headlights did not pierce the gloom.

Then suddenly, it seemed as though something caught at his foot and he went down sprawling. For a moment the fall knocked the breath out of him and he lay there, the hair beginning to creep on his scalp, his blood frozen in his veins. What had clutched at him out of the dark?

Feeling the need for action, he slowly began to flounder to his feet, expecting every moment to feel again that ghastly touch upon him.

But nothing happened and he stood there for a moment, striving to regain his composure. The thing, whatever it was, had grasped him about the knees. It must, then, be somewhere near the floor.

He bent over, trying to throw the light from his lamps upon the spot where he felt the thing to be. Was it a devil fish perhaps, like the one which had attacked Dick so short a time before? No, because the devil fish would not have let go. He would still be in its grip——.

He bent closer and then an exclamation of horror broke from him. The Thing which he had stumbled over, which had seemed to reach out bony arms to grip him, was a skeleton, a

horrible thing lying crumpled up on the floor of the cabin.

Phil did not wait to see any more. In his explorations of the cabin he had found the door and toward this he groped his way. Rotted with years under the sea it gave beneath his touch, the rotten wood parting from the rusted hinges.

Driven by something he didn"t name, Phil made his way forward toward where he supposed the hold of the vessel to be. He would enter no more cabins unless he failed to find the treasure anywhere else. He tried to keep from his mind the thought of that huddle of bones which had once been a man.

It was a difficult passage and a slow one through the bowels of the sunken ship. Often Phil encountered wreckage that he supposed had been made by the explosion of the dynamite. Once the debris was so thick that it took him several minutes to clear it away.

"No treasure yet," he muttered to himself as he made his way forward. "At this rate I'll have to have another hack at it. Ho—what have we here?"

The exclamation was caused by the sudden revealing of a large cavern-like aperture that opened up before him. This must be the hold of the vessel and the treasure was more likely to be here than in any other part of the ship.

Once more he felt the wild thrill of the hunt and he plunged forward, his one thought to pierce the mysterious darkness and find what—if anything—it hid from him.

He stumbled and with a great effort kept himself from falling headlong. His lights revealed another skeleton propped up in a sitting position against a great brass-bound chest.

A return of the horror which Phil had felt upon discovery of the dead man in the cabin was mixed with a thrill of the purest excitement.

That brass-bound chest—what did it contain? He lunged forward and with the hooks that served him as hands strove to lift the cover. No use! The chest was padlocked and the top held firm.

Mad with excitement by this time he made his way further into the hold. There was another chest but it, like its fellow, was locked.

Impatiently Phil turned away and then—something glittered in the light of his lamps, something that gleamed faintly yellow.

With a hoarse cry Phil stooped and picked up the shining thing. Gold, gold, the magic touch of it! The joy that throbbed through him was almost pain. The thing that, up to this moment had seemed like a glittering dream was now within his grasp. Where there was one coin there must be more——.

He was on his knees now, groping about the

floor of the place, eagerly, searchingly. More—there must be more——. Ah! There, just within the radiance of his lights lay a heap of them, shining, golden things, a fortune lying at the bottom of the sea, waiting to be claimed.

For there, standing beside the heap of golden coins stood that which at first made Phil's heart stand still, then race madly on again.

A chest, rotted and burst open scattered its riches lavishly, carpeting the dingy floor with coins and gems. For there were jewels too, although the gold predominated—a handful of diamonds, an emerald, a ruby—.

Never would Phil forget the joy, the triumph of that moment. This treasure, theirs, for the taking!

There were other chests but they were tight-bound like the rest and Phil could only surmise the nature of their contents. If, as it was reasonable to suppose, they contained treasure similar to that which the open chest disgorged, there was indeed a fortune worthy of a king.

So lost was he in the wonder of his discovery that Phil lost all count of time or place. He was brought rudely to a realization of the present by a sharp tug at the line. There came another tug and another a signal which told Phil that, for some reason or other, his friends thought it best for him to return to the surface.

The fellows! He had almost forgotten them

in his excitement. Wait till he had told them what he had found. Just wait!

Hastily he gathered up a few of the coins and a gem or two, slipped them into the small black bag he had brought for the purpose and made his way back through the debris-filled hull, careful to keep the line free.

After two or three attempts he succeeded in swinging himself to the deck—or what was left of it—then dropped to the sand of the ocean bed.

Making sure once more that his line was free he tugged mightily as a signal that he was ready for the ascent.

Once more numberless dead fish surounded him but now they had no terrors for him. He was madly exultant. He had found the treasure! What were a few dead fish against that fact?

Then he had reached the surface. Through the "eyes" of his suit he saw the anxious faces of his comrades. He exulted when he thought how in a moment their expressions would change——.

They hauled him aboard the raft where he carefully placed the small black bag behind him. He didn't mean that the fellows should see it till he got ready to let them! Then he started to struggle with his suit.

"Better wait to take it off till we get back to shore, Phil." "We hauled you up because

there's a bad storm brewing—looks like the beginning of a hurricane."

"Did you find anything," cried Steve, eagerly.

"Wait till we get back to shore and I'll answer your question," returned Phil, his voice sounding doubly mysterious, coming as it did from within the suit. "In a few minutes I'll tell you everything you want to know."

Something in his tone made them wild with curiosity but they knew Phil well enough to be sure that for the moment they would get no more from him.

They had no sooner reached land and pulled the boats out of harm's way when the threatened storm broke furiously. They got Phil out of his suit and made a dash for the shelter of the cave.

Once inside they turned and faced him.

"Now—out with it!" they demanded.

CHAPTER XVIII

Gold and Jewels

For answer, Phil extended the small black bag toward them. Dick grabbed it with a cry and the others crowded around him. Bimbo pressed close, his mouth hanging ludicrously open.

With trembling fingers Dick fumbled with the strings of the bag then plunged his hand to the bottom of it. The hand returned, grasping three golden coins, the first fruits of the treasure.

For a moment pandemonium reigned. The boys acted like crazy men. They grasped each other about the waist and rollicked in a sort of wild war dance about the place, shouting at the top of their lungs. Bimbo's mouth was stretched in a grin that must have hurt.

"Yassir," he was saying over and over again, his rich darky voice raised above the din, "I don said ef anybody could find dat dere gol'en treasure, dat man was Marse Phil. Yassir, dis nigger done allus said Marse Phil de greatest treasure hunter what is. Yassir!"

After they had quieted down sufficiently to

care to hear details, Phil recounted his adventures in the hull of the ship, not even omitting the part where he had stumbled over the dead man's bones.

At this part in the narrative Bimbo was seen to gaze apprehensively over his shoulder. Trying to attract as little attention as possible, he crept nearer to the absorbed group about Phil.

However, Bimbo was not the only one who felt an uncanny chill in the atmosphere. For a moment each one had put himself in Phil's place, had stumbled over some horrible object, the skeleton of a man who generations ago had lived and breathed.

"Gee, Phil," Tom said, in an awed voice. "I bet a little company would have come in handy just then—something beside dead men's bones."

"You said something," replied Phil fervently adding, with a gleam in his eyes that seemed to be reflected from the gold itself, "But when I found that chest burst wide open, spilling out its golden contents, believe me, I forgot all about skeletons and everything else. I even forgot that my oxygen was running low. Say, but that was a sight!"

"You lucky dog," cried Steve, enviously. "What do you mean by hogging all the fun, anyway?"

"I haven't," replied Phil, with a grin. "Didn't I bring a chunk of it up with me?"

"You sure did," said Jack Benton, adding, with an attempt to control his own excitement. "Tell me something, Phil. How much wealth, in United States money do you figure there is down there in the hold of the ship?"

"I don't know," returned Phil, slowly. "You see there were some precious stones, too and it would be hard for me to give the value of them. Then too, for all we know, the other chests may not contain anything of value at all."

"Say not so," cried Steve reproachfully. "What are you trying to do, anyway? Throw gloom on this happy party."

"Nothing like it," grinned Phil, adding as he took up the little black bag and emptied the rest of its contents on the table. "Look at that diamond and that ruby. They must be worth a small fortune in themselves."

The boys gasped. They had been so absorbed in Phil's story that they had taken it for granted that the handful of coins which Dick had brought forth was all the bag contained. They had not even examined the coins closely. The mere fact that they were gold had been enough for them then.

Now they regarded the exquisite jewels which Phil had brought up from the bottom of the sea almost with a feeling of awe. It seemed impossible that they could be real.

But they were real. Even the boys, inex-

perienced in such matters as they were, could tell that. And as Phil had said, they were tremendously valuable.

"Were there many more like these?" asked Jack Benton softly.

Phil shook his head.

"There were mostly coins," he said, "with a handful of gems sprinkled in for good luck. I believe the treasure, in that one chest, at least, was almost all gold."

"Well, what do we want, the earth?" demanded Dick as he examined the coin he held. "Look here fellows," he added, "This gold piece is a queer sort of duck. It has Spanish lettering on it——"

"A doubloon, probably," said Jack Benton. "And this coin I have is a French louis——"

"And mine's a guinea," broke in Tom with a chuckle. "These guys seem to have gathered their plunder from all parts of the world."

"I guess it didn't make much difference to them what nation they stole from," Jack Benton agreed. "They played no favorites. But say, just listen to that storm, fellows," he interrupted himself as the wind wailed wildly about the cave. "It's worse than the gale that greeted us and drove us on the rocks."

"Sure is a beauty," said Steve. "Lucky we have a cave to live in. Can't be blown down, at any rate."

Phil moved across to the door of the cave and stood looking out into the hurricane.

"It must have been just such a storm," he remarked softly, as though he were more than half speaking to himself, "in which the pirate ship foundered centuries ago. Seems kind of queer, someway."

"What seems queer?" said Dick who had come to stand beside him.

"Why," said Phil, still with that strange air of speaking to himself, "that there should be such a storm on the very day when we have broken into the hull of the dead ship. It's uncanny——"

A frightened wail from the corner where Bimbo had taken refuge brought him up short and he faced about with a sheepish laugh.

"Don't mind me, fellows," he said. "I guess I'm still a little shaken up from what I saw down there today in the cabin of that poor old hulk. The storm sort of brought it home to me. Well," he added, striving to make his tone sound matter-of-fact, "suppose we talk over plans for rescuing the treasure. I'll feel easier when we have it safe right here under our noses."

What was that strange uneasiness that had taken possession of him? Even in the excitement of making plans and the jubilation of the boys he could not entirely shake it off.

Here they were alone on this island where in

all probability no one else had set foot for many years. The adventure of this day had met with success beyond his wildest dreams. The treasure was there—was theirs. All they had to do was to take it. There was no earthly reason to feel uneasy and yet he was uneasy.

All during the long hours—and they sat up way into the night exulting—he was haunted by a sensation of impending evil. Thinking that he was overwrought by the days adventure, he tried to dismiss these thoughts but without very much success.

Long after his comrades were sleeping soundly he lay staring into the dark. Once he caught himself straining his ears to catch some fancied sound.

The storm had died down and the night, save for the low drumming of the waves on the beach, was so still that he could almost hear his heart beat.

What was he listening for, he asked himself. The night was breathless. He could have heard nothing. Then, calling himself all kinds of a fool he turned over and went to sleep.

He woke, struggling through a sea of unconsciousness, with the distinct feeling that an unseen presence was near him. Not fully awake, he sprang to his feet, revolver in hand.

Was it imagination that the figure of a man, vague and indistinct as the night itself, slipped

from the cave? His vision was blurred with sleep. Impatiently he rubbed a hand across his eyes.

With a bound he was at the door of the cave —outside, straining his eyes in an effort to pierce the shadows.

There was nothing. No sign, no sound save the monotonous moaning of the waves upon the beach.

He walked a little way, searching, his revolver held ready for action. Still he saw nothing. Reluctantly he turned back toward the cave.

He lay down again but not to sleep. For a long time he lay there, watchful, alert. As the first faint grey of dawn tinged the sky he relaxed his vigil and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIX

A Perplexing Mystery

It was not hard in the reassuring sunlight of the "morning after" for Phil to tell himself that his experience of the night before had been nothing more than a peculiarly vivid dream.

There was the temptation to tell the fellows about it, but on second thought he decided to hold his peace. The memory of how they had laughed when he had thought he heard a shot was still with him and he was not anxious to give them the chance to laugh a second time.

Besides, as has been said before, he was almost convinced himself that his imagination had played a trick upon him. And yet—that man's figure, sinister, stealthly, stealing from the shadows of the cave into the blackness of the night. He could have sworn at the moment that he saw it. Was it possible for his eyes so to betray him?

Since there was no one to answer the question for him, Phil wisely decided to leave it unanswered and put the incident, as far as was possible, completely out of his mind.

This was not so hard a task, either, seeing

that there was plenty to occupy his mind in excited plans for the recovery of the treasure.

However, these plans were destined to be nipped in the bud. For the sun which, early in the morning had given promise of a glorious day, went suddenly behind a cloud and there was that dead, breathless stillness in the air which the boys had come to know invariably presaged a storm.

"Confound the luck," growled Dick, as together they stood outside the cave, looking uncertainly at the threatening sky. "Seems to me the storm we had yesterday should have cleared the atmosphere——"

"We're in for another one, just the same," said Jack Benton, his own face clouded with concern. "It's hard luck just when we fairly had our hands upon the treasure but after all it only means a delay of a day or two, perhaps only a few hours. You know how soon these tropical storms pass."

"I'm for trying it, anyway," said Dick, who was always impatient of delay. "What do you say Phil?" he added, turning to his chum.

But Phil slowly shook his head.

"Can't be done, old boy," he said. "It would be suicide to go out in the teeth of one of these storms. You ought to have seen enough of them by this time to know that. Guess we'll have to wait till the weather decides to be nice."

Bimbo nodded his head approvingly.

"That's whar you shows yo' common sense, Marse Phil," he applauded. "'Taint no use invitin' d'undertaker to make us a visit. He's done likely t' come wivout no invitation, anyways—"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Phil curiously with the grin he always saved for Bimbo.

"Ah means, Marse Phil," returned the black boy, emphatically, "thet there aint no luck, no how lingerin' on this island. Mah advice to you, Marse Phil is dat you grab dat treasure an' skip out o' here as fas' you legs kin carry yo'. Yassir, Marse Phil, ef yo was to ask dis nigger for advice dat's what he'd be tellin' yo'."

The other boys and Jack Benton were frankly grinning but Phil was still curious.

"What makes you feel that way, Bimbo?" he asked. "Anything 'special."

The darky scratched his head with a puzzled expression.

"Nosah, Marse Phil," he said at last with the air of one striving for the exact truth, "Ah cain't go so far's t'say they's anythin' 'special makes me know dis island ain't no good place to linger in, but Ah knows it aint, jes' the same. I don' feel it in my bones—yassir, Marse Phil, I don' *feel* it."

"Well, as long as you confine the feeling to

your bones, Bimbo," said Jack Benton, dryly, "I guess it can't do anyone any harm."

"Why, you old gloom hound you," cried Steve, clapping poor Bimbo on the back with a force that made him wince. "What do you mean by saying this island isn't good luck. What do you call the finding of the treasure, eh? I suppose that was bad luck!"

Bimbo shook his head, still wearing the puzzled look.

"No sah," he said and turned toward the cave adding something under his breath that sounded like "yo ain't got dat treasure, yet, no sir, you aint *got* dat treasure, yet."

Steve looked after him exasperated, then turned to Phil.

"What do you suppose the fellow means?" he asked.

Phil shrugged.

"He doesn't know himself, probably," he answered. "Darkies always do look on the black side of things."

"Maybe due to their color," grinned Tom, and so the thing passed off with a laugh.

By this time the sky had darkened until it was almost like night on the island and a wind had risen. The boys knew that any further adventuring for the treasure was off, for that day at least, and so they resigned themselves to the inevitable. Not without a good deal of grumb-

ling, however, for their disappointment was keen. They had counted on having part of the treasure safely stowed away by nightfall.

And that was not the worst of it. The storm, unlike the others which they had encountered, refused to blow over in a few hours. It continued all that day and the next and well into the next. Even though the wind had abated most of its fury it seemed to the exasperated boys as though the rain would never stop. It came in a steady sheeting downpour until it seemed as though the heavens must be emptied of every drop of moisture. And still it rained.

Although there was no chance at present of salvaging the treasure, the boys refused to be held prisoners with in the cave. Putting on rain coats and boots and drawing their caps down over their eyes, they plunged out into the beating rain with a sense of defying the elements. This was on the afternoon of the third day.

"Maybe if the rain sees we don't scare for it, it will get tired and stop," said Tom boyishly as they trudged along, heads down, collars turned up about their ears.

"I hope so, but I doubt it," returned Dick, gloomily. "Looks as if this state of things were going to continue for another week at least."

Jack Benton and Bimbo had declined to accompany the boys, the former because he felt it necessary that some one should stay at the cave,

and Bimbo because he disliked wet weather in general.

"I wonder what that old boy has on his mind," said Dick, speaking of Bimbo. "He sure thinks this island is all to the bad. I wonder if he knows anything that we don't know."

"What a crazy idea," snorted Tom. "What could he know?"

Again it was on the point of Phil's tongue to speak of the shadowy figure he thought he had seen, but again he restrained himself. He wasn't going to be laughed at.

They had reached a rise of ground which overlooked the ocean, and as Steve glanced out toward the water he suddenly grabbed Phil's arm and pointed.

"Look at that whale out there," he cried. "And there's another one."

"Why there's a whole school of them," cried Tom, excitedly. "Say, I'm glad I lived to see this."

"They seem to be all-fired excited about something too," observed Steve. "I wonder what's up."

"A sword fish," said Phil, beneath his breath. "He's after them—attacking the whole bunch single-handed."

Sure enough, following Phil's pointed finger the boys saw a gigantic fish of peculiar shape flashing in and out among the whales attacking

promiscuously. The water was lashed to a froth by the frantic efforts of the great mammals to get away from their tormentor and soon the surface of the water showed streaks of blood.

"My, he's sure some fighter, that swordfish," said Steve admiringly. "I'd hate to have him for an enemy."

"Look," cried Tom delightedly. "The whole bunch is making for deep water routed by one sharp-toothed fish. You have to hand it to him."

They had started on again when suddenly they felt a sickening sensation, as if the earth were rocking beneath their feet. Then, before they could even guess what was happening to them there came a terrific unheaval that flung them from their feet.

There was the sound as of a mighty roar—as though the universe were crackling and breaking about them.

CHAPTER XX

The Earthquake

For a moment they lay stunned by the force with which they had been flung from their feet. Then slowly, one after another they got to their feet, staring stupidly about them.

What had happened? Had a meteor struck the island? Was this the beginning of wholesale destruction? Then came the answer to their confused minds. An earthquake!

The earth was still shaking and quivering beneath them. At any moment might come another quake that would destroy the island and them with it. A deadly nausea was creeping over them. They felt shaken, sick.

Phil was the first to get to his feet. The earth slithered and slid under him and he reeled like a drunken man. There came a second shock, less severe than the first but sufficient to throw him from his balance again.

As Phil struck the ground for the second time, he became suddenly mad clean through. A sort of rage possessed him and he rose to his feet again, shaking his fist at the elements as if they

were some tangible enemy that he must conquer. Afterward he could laugh at his fury but it was not funny at the time.

He looked about him and saw the damage wrought by the earthquake. The tremendous roar that had greeted the first shock had been caused by the wholesale uprooting of trees. Great fissures had opened in the earth and into these some of the fallen trees had precipitated themselves.

The ground beneath his feet was quiet now and, bringing his eyes back from the ruin about him he saw that the other boys had risen and were standing shakily beside him.

"Gee, what happened?" said Tom, gingerly feeling of a bump on the back of his head. "I thought it was the end of the world that time for sure."

"That's what it was, pretty near, for us," said Phil, quietly. "Look!" and he pointed toward the mountain lifting its threatening bulk against the sky. A thin, curling line of smoke was hovering above it, a line that thickened even while they looked.

There was a gasp of dismay from the boys as they realized what that sinister film meant. To their suddenly cleared minds it could mean only one thing. The mountain was on the verge of eruption!

"Looks as if they'd got us comin' or goin' "

said Steve, trying to speak lightly, without in the least disguising his true state of mind." If the earth doesn't open and swallow us up, the volcano will erupt and bury us. Fine prospect, I should call it!"

It took them a long time to get back to the cave, retarded as they were by the piled-up trunks of uprooted trees and the yawning fissures in the earth.

And all the way they kept a wary eye on that film of smoke above the mountain that grew in volume with every minute. There was no doubt about it, the volcano was getting ready for action.

When they came near the cave they saw that Benton and Bimbo were looking for them anxiously, and when they appeared Jack looked as though a thousand ton weight had fallen from his shoulders and the faithful Bimbo almost wept in his joy.

"I sho did think yo' was a goner that time, Marse Phil," he kept repeating over and over, pawing over Phil as though he could not satisfy himself that his young master was really alive and unhurt. "Dat earthquake done make so much noise, I done thought you'd gone clean to de bottom of it."

"What—the earthquake?" asked Phil, with a shaky laugh." Never as bad as that, Bimbo. Trust this old penny to turn up every time."

Then they talked things over and decided that the only wise thing to do was to recover the chests from the pirate ship as soon as possible and desert their perilous position on the island.

"That's all very well," said Steve at the end of their "pow-wow." "But how are we going to do anything, I'd like to know, as long as this storm keeps up."

"It can't keep up forever," said Phil, beginning to recover his cheerful outlook, "and if we're not wrecked by earthquake or buried by lava for a week, we ought to be able to get off with the treasure and our lives as well. And then for the good old U. S. A. where they don't have earthquakes."

The boys brightened at this but still were inclined to be gloomy.

"Get away," repeated Dick. "What will we get away in, I'd like to know?"

"We've got our radio outfit," said Phil a bit uneasily, for he was thinking again of that curling film of smoke against the sky. "If worst comes to worst we can always radio for help. And," he added confidently, "the worst isn't going to come."

And how could he know what was in store for them?

Just before they turned in that night there

came another quake, slight, but just enough to revive the seasick feeling of the afternoon.

Poor Bimbo's panic and dread of the island were steadily growing worse and in the darkness the boys could hear him muttering words that sounded as if he were praying.

"Poor Bimbo," thought Phil as he yielded to the drowsiness that was stealing over him. "He sure is having a rotten time. We'll have to see that he gets a—good part—of the—treasure——" And the next he knew he was opening his eyes to see the sun blazing merrily outside the cave. It was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

It didn't take him long to get the fellows awake and stirring. It seemed as if the sunshine had some magic in it. Gone were the gloomy forebodings of the night before and as they got into their clothes sniffing hungrily at the breakfast Bimbo was getting for them they sang and bandied jokes as if they hadn't a care in the world.

And, except for that patch of smoke that made a dark smudge against the brightness of the sky, they hadn't. How many fellows, they asked themselves joyfully, would give their eyes to be in their shoes now. A treasure of untold riches waiting for them at the bottom of the sea and to-day—*to-day*—they would claim it. Lucky? Well, they'd tell the world!

And yet as, ready for the great adventure, they stepped outside the cave and their eyes fell on that heavy, lowering cloud of smoke hanging low above the mountain, they felt again uneasy and apprehensive.

It would be just as well to hurry the thing through. Bimbo was right. The island was a rather unhealthy place to linger in.

And so they worked feverishly, anxious to salvage the treasure without further delay. Everything went well with them, seemed to conspire to help them.

Once more Phil was lowered to the ocean bed but this time he carried a strong cable, the other end of which was held tightly by the boys some hundred and fifty feet above him.

This time there was no stumbling hesitation in his progress. He had been there before. He knew the way!

Straight for the hold he made, careful to keep both the line and cable free of the wreckage. It can't be said that, as he passed through the cabin where he had first stumbled over the skeleton of the long dead pirate, he did not experience an uncanny thrill. He did but, as he told himself with an uneasy laugh, he was getting used to it by this time. Pretty soon he would be able to walk through a whole sea of dead men without turning a hair!

Just the same, the chest to which he fastened

the cable was not the one against which leaned the second pirate's skeleton. Phil had a weird feeling that to disturb it would be to invite disaster upon himself.

Of course when all the other chests had been hauled to the surface, he would be forced to disturb that awful, reclining figure. But, not yet!

He gave the signal agreed upon that all was in readiness and slowly the heavy chest left its fellows and moved along the littered floor. Phil went with it, sometimes before it, sometimes behind, moving objects out of its way pushing, hauling.

Then came the moment when he stood upon the scarred and mutilated deck of the schooner and watched the chest rise above his head, higher, higher, till he could no longer follow its ascent.

A wild thrill shot through him. By that one act they had conquered the deep. At last the treasure was within their grasp!

CHAPTER XXI

From the Ocean Bed

Three boxes they retrieved from the sunken vessel that day, and since it was getting dark when the last of these was hauled to the surface, they decided to postpone any further operations till the next day.

The boys were curiously silent as they tugged and hauled the chests to the cave where they might examine their contents. Suppose the mysterious boxes did not contain treasure after all? They were almost afraid to open them.

Phil it was who began to pry off the lid of the first box. His body ached with fatigue from his adventures under the sea but he never even thought of it. His whole mind was concentrated on the business of getting that lid off.

The boys stood around him holding their breath, their eyes fairly burning with excited expectation of what they hoped to see.

Then with a grinding noise the ancient lock gave way and the cover slipped off. The boys

gave a wild cry and sank to their knees beside the open chest. They couldn't speak. They could hardly think. They knelt there, bathing their hands in a wealth of golden coins and sparkling gems, a treasure that had defied the years under the sea, the old pirate's treasure come to life and glittering as brightly as it had on that day so long ago when the ship had sunk with the loss of all her crew.

If the boys had seemed crazy when Phil had emptied the little black bag of coins and gems before them, bringing them the first word of the treasure, they were ten times worse now.

They laughed, they danced, they shouted to one another. Steve scandalized Bimbo by seizing the black boy about the waist and whirling him madly about the cave, ending up in a gyrating mass of arms and legs as they slipped and landed on the floor totgether.

Even Jack Benton acted for a little while as though he had "gone loco." It was a long time before they could pull themselves together enough to open the other two chests.

When they finally came around to it, Dick grabbed the chisel—with which they had pried off the cover of the first chest—from Phil's hand, going to work on the second chest himself.

"You're getting stingy," he said, in reply

to Phil's look of surprise. "You opened the first chest. Now it's my turn."

"Why care who opens it," retorted Phil, "as long as it gets opened. Only, hurry up, you old snail, or I may be tempted to give you some help, anyway."

As a matter of fact it did take some time to get the cover off for Dick was so excited his hands trembled and he seemed to lack his usual amount of strength.

However, although the impatient boys offered insistently to help him, he kept them off, offering to "lay them out" with the chisel if they got too "fresh."

At last the cover gave and they found themselves staring fascinated into a chest whose contents seemed at first glance to fully equal in value the contents of the first one.

Without stopping for a closer look, they opened the third box, Steve officiating this time and Tom grumbling because there wasn't a fourth chest—to which Phil replied that if Tom would wait till the next day he would try to oblige him—and this one also, was heaped to the brim with shining gold pieces, interspersed with jewels of rare beauty and value.

The boys, feeling as though they were living through an amazing dream, took out handful after handful of the gold pieces and here and there a precious jewel, examining

them closely beneath the light of their electric torches.

Like the samples which Phil had first brought to them, they found that the coins were of English and French and Spanish origin, all very old and bearing dates that thrilled the boys with the romance of those old days.

"Say, what would you give to have been able to live in those times," said Tom softly, his eyes gleaming as he turned a gold piece over and over in his fingers.

"I'd just as soon be living now," retorted Steve with a grin. "I bet the old pirates never had a more adventurous day than we have just lived through."

"You bet," murmured Dick. "Just wait till we tell the folks. They didn't want us to come on this trip but I reckon when we show them a few of these little goldpieces, they'll be sort of glad we came."

"We ought to be able to rescue the rest of the treasure to-morrow," said Phil. "And then—"

"Home to God's country," finished Jack Benton.

Bimbo, over in his corner, shook his head and was heard to mutter something like, "Ah says Amen to dat, boss, Ah sho' does."

"Bimbo, you old gloom hound," Phil called out with a laugh, "You don't mean to say you

still think this island is unlucky—after to-day's run of luck?"

"Well," returned Bimbo, placing his head on one side reflectively. "Ah don' know as Ah'd go as far as dat, Marse Phil, but Ah sure will think hit's luckier when we don' got d'ocean between hit an' us. Yassir, Marse Phil, Ah could jes' love dis here islan'—at a distance."

They laughed and Steve poked the black boy in the ribs but just the same, his persistent dislike of the island made them uneasy even in this moment of triumph.

In the excitement of the day they had forgotten the ominous cloud of smoke hanging low above the mountain and Bimbo's words recalled it to them.

Perhaps, after all, an eruption from that volcanic giant might defeat them just when victory seemed most certain. If only they had not lost their ship on their ill-fated approach to the island. In that, they might escape at a moment's notice but now, even with the aid of radio their escape might be delayed just too long——.

With an effort they put aside the unwelcome thought, abandoning themselves once more to joy in the finding of the treasure. There was some talk of what they should do with the wealth now that they had it.

Phil wanted to bury it but the boys laughed at the idea.

Were they not the only inhabitants of the island? What need then for such extreme caution?

Phil, remembering the shot he thought he had heard, recalling the figure that had slunk like a shadow from the cave, could not help feeling that there might be need of caution but he said nothing. Only half convinced himself that what he had seen had not been a shadow and that what he had heard had been a shot, how could he hope to convince his comrades that danger lurked upon the island? He was more than half inclined to laugh at the idea himself.

At last they were able to tear themselves away from the treasure long enough to snatch a few hours of sleep. They must be up and doing bright and early if they hoped to recover the rest of the treasure that day. Then they would radio some passing ship, stow themselves and the treasure aboard and sail for home. Was it any wonder their dreams were pleasant?

Phil woke suddenly from a dream in which he was displaying his part of the treasure to his excited and admiring parents, woke surdenly and completely, with every sense on the alert.

As on that other night, he had a distinct sensation that some one was near him, had passed stealthily close to him. Holding his

breath he lay motionless, straining his eyes to pierce the gloom of the place.

No sound save the regular breathing of his companions, the pounding of the sea on the sand—hark! What was that? He was not dreaming now. Someone, at the other end of the cave was moving cautiously, feeling his way. Once he stumbbled and an involuntary oath escaped his lips to be immediately stifled.

The blood tingling in his veins, as quiet as a panther who is waiting to leap upon his prey, Phil lay upon his bed, every muscle tensed for the spring.

The figure of a man, crouching outlined itself against the gap that formed the door of the cave. Silently as a ghost Phil slipped from the bed, stood erect, his hands outstretched hungrily for the fellow's throat.

CHAPTER XXII

Quelling a Mutiny

In the act of springing forward Phil paused. All his life he was to be thankful for that pause. If he had yielded to the impulse to throttle the man then and there what fate might have overtaken him and his comrades, he shuddered to guess.

Suddenly Phil knew that the wisest thing would be to follow this midnight marauder, this spy who prowled at night. He would find out where he came from, the mystery of his presence here on the remote island. Then would be time enough to punish him.

With all his senses curiously alert Phil crept to the door as the man slipped into the shadows outside the cave. He tried to pierce the darkness but it was almost impossible. There was no moon and it would be necessary to follow closely upon the heels of the fellow if he were not to lose him altogether.

Of course, because of this, it was necessary to exercise double precaution. If the man should suspect he was being followed, should

turn around, well, then it would mean a fight to the finish there in the darkness. Phil, fingering the revolver he always kept at his hand, was not afraid of the result but he was afraid that, in such case, the mystery of the man's presence upon the island might remain unsolved.

He was thinking very clearly now, his mind curiously alert to the slightest detail. He had not imagined the shot, then, that was certain. Also he was convinced now that the first vision he had had of this man, slinking out of the cave had not been a dream.

Probably the fellow had been spying for a long time. The thought wasn't a pleasant one. Spying—for what. Instantly the answer came to him. The treasure of course! Stupid of him not to have thought of it before.

His mind was racing excitedly. It was hard in his whirling thoughts for him to remember to walk silently, hard to keep track of that shadowy figure among the shadows.

The fellow was proceeding rapidly now without exercising the slightest caution. Apparently he was aware of no danger. Of course not, thought Phil, grimly. He naturally thought them all asleep, unaware of his prying. In the darkness he thanked his lucky star that he had been sleeping lightly.

In the darkness, Phil had scant idea of the direction they were taking, only that they

seemed to be heading diagonally across the island and that their destination—or rather, the destination of the man he was following—seemed to be a long way off.

Naturally it must be, he thought grimly. He, in company with the rest of the fellows had never explored the island very thoroughly, owing to their absorption in treasure hunting. This fellow must be headed for the very outermost edge of the island, that they had never quite reached.

It seemed an endless journey to Phil. He was constantly afraid that some sound of his might cause the fellow to turn around and so put an end for the time being to the solution of the mystery. And with the thought he stepped still more carefully, moving swiftly to keep his quarry in sight. The progress was made still more difficult because of the fallen trunks of trees flung ruthlessly to the ground by the earthquake of the day before.

Phil was beginning to believe that this nightmare journey was to last forever when he noticed suddenly that the deep shadows of the night had lifted, become mingled with red. Then he grasped the fact that the vague light came from a fire, probably built far down in the ravine.

A moment more as he topped the rise of a small hill, he saw that this supposition was

correct. From the shore they had been climbing steadily till now he was able to look straight down the steeply-sloping mountain side into a snug little gully or ravine some three hundred feet below.

In this ravine flickered and flared the fire which had lifted the night shadows. Phil saw that the man he followed was heading straight for it and he slackened his pace. He was no longer afraid he might lose his quarry in the dark. He could see quite clearly now, and he suddenly realized that his need for caution was doubled.

For, gathered around the fire, revealed by the dancing flames, Phil discovered other figures than the one he was following. From that distance he could not count them, but there seemed a startling number.

At that moment Phil came nearer to dismay than he had ever come before in his life. It was bad enough to know that there were other people on this island which they had thought deserted. But the fact that one of these intruders had been caught in the act of spying upon them, upon the treasure, seemed to point surely to the fact that they were there for one purpose and one purpose only. To steal the treasure!

Phil's first feeling of astonishment and dismay was rapidly giving place to anger. The

treasure was theirs, they, of their own effort had dragged it from the bottom of the sea. He'd like to see anybody take it away from them!

He clenched his hands and crept closer. The man who had unwittingly led him to this spot had disappeared among the trees and Phil followed cautiously, careful to keep within the shadows of the trees.

It would never do for him to be found out now. Not only would his own life be forfeited but probably those of his friends, also. And the treasure—at the thought he clenched his hands still tighter, gritted his teeth fiercely and crept closer, ever closer to that flickering fire.

He was near enough now to see the features of the men gathered about it. They were a villainous-looking crew if there ever was one, the scum of a West Indian port, half-breeds most of them, sullen-looking rascals who looked as though they would stop at no villainy.

There were a score of them, counting the rascal he had been trailing who now stepped within the circle of firelight. Phil gave a start that was almost audible as he saw the man's face. It was Ramirez—Ramirez of the evil face and ready knife.

Quite suddenly the whole thing became clear to him. Ramirez, knowing of the secret contained in the pirate's notes in the possession of

Jack Benton, had either gotten wind of their mission in San Domingo, or had guessed at it. On the strength of his story it would be easy to get together a gang of cutthroats, a band of villainous adventurers and follow them to the island with the purpose of eventually getting possession of the treasure.

Something told Phil that these men would stop at nothing and his anger grew to a kind of fury. He had the mad impulse to charge the whole dastardly crew of them, to fling himself upon them single-handed.

If he had had only himself to consider, he might have done it too. But he thought of his comrades and the treasure and knew that he must move cautiously.

Ramirez, evidently the leader of the rascally crew was speaking, and Phil crept closer, careful to keep well without the circle of firelight. He strained his ears to hear the muttered words of the half-breed. He must learn their plans. Even from this distance he could see that Ramirez was excited, his deep-set eyes were glowing feverishly.

"All is well," Phil heard him say to his sullen-eyed audience. "They have found the treasure. I have seen it with these own eyes, hiddn in the cave where they leave it unguarded —the fools!"

At his words, the eyes of the motley crew

glowed with the gleam of avarice and they waxed tremendously excited. They gestured wildly with their arms, each one gabbling in a different tongue.

Ramirez's brow grew dark. He made an ominous movement with his hand toward the gun on his hip. The men regarded him with a sort of half-cowed fury. Most of them fell to conversing again in low, excited mutterings.

Only one among them seemed to have the courage—or the avarice—to defy his chief. This seemed, like most of them, to be a mixture of two nationalities, half-English, half-Spanish. He talked in broken English.

"I say to you," he cried with a menacing gesture toward Ramirez who looked at him stolidly, "that we will not wait longer. Always you say 'wait, wait.' The treasure, the gold, is there, you tell us that. We go get it to-night, now. Is it not so?" He turned to the men about the fire, who, muttering ominously, had half risen to their feet.

Phil, forgetting his own danger, watched fascinted. Mutiny! If the men got their way, then inded were he and his friends and the treasure doomed. He would not even have a chance to warn them.

Ramirez, who had been standing motionless, his black eyes fixed on the mutinous crew,

reached suddenly for his revolver. Almost with the same motion came the report.

The man who had defied him, stood where he was for a moment, a foolish expression spreading over his villainous features, then, without a sound sank to the ground.

"Take him away," commanded Ramirez, seating himself, with the utmost indifference to the fate of his victim, near the fire. "That, my comrades, will be the fate of each one of you who defy me, Ramirez. I say wait. Therefore we wait. And I tell you why."

Then while two of the men removed the ghastly huddled heap from the grass, Ramirez proceeded to give his reason for delaying the attack. Phil listened eagerly. Half-sickened as he was by what he had seen, he knew he must keep his senses intensely alert.

"They have not recovered all of the treasure," said Ramirez. "I hear them talk. They have three chests. There are more. When they have them all, then we shall take them from them. We shall be rich and they—they shall be dead." His mouth stretched in an evil grin.

Phil waited for no more. Silently, as he had come, he slipped away into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Horrors of the Lagoon

Not until he had reached the rise of ground from which he had first looked down into the ravine did Phil pause. Then he turned and cast one backward glance at the sinister group gathered about the fire.

They seemed to have settled down into a drunken sleep, for their figures, dwarfed with distance, were sprawled upon the ground and the fire had burned low.

Phil wondered about the man whom Ramirez had shot down. Was he dead? He shuddered at the thought of that shapeless, huddled figure on the grass. He turned and hurried on through the blackness.

But he had not gone very far when he was stopped by an obstruction which had not been there when he had passed that way before.

At this point the rocky side of the mountain jutted almost to the sea. Phil remembered how when he had been cautiously following the flitting shadow of Ramirez, he had been forced

to circle this projection, coming well out onto the sandy beach.

Now there was no beach, nothing but a swirling sea of water, seeming to mock at his helplessness. For a moment Phil was dumbfounded and then the explanation of the thing came to him.

While he had been following Ramirez, while he had been spying upon that band of ruffians gathered about the fire, the water, urged on by the incoming tide, had crept up and up until it had covered that narrow strip of sand, pounding in vain against the almost perpendicular side of the mountain.

For a moment Phil did not realize the full meaning of this calamtiy. But it was not long before the peril of his predicament was brought home to him.

At first he thought that the water could not be very deep. He did not realize how long a time had passed since he had been that way before. Tentatively he put his foot in it, then stepped back quickly. He had seen something that made the blood run cold in his veins.

There, dimly outlined in the wan light of the stars was the dorsal fin of a shark! He thought there were more than one, but he could not be sure.

Sharks! It is no wonder that for a moment Phil felt utterly thwarted and helpless. He

was caught, caught in a trap as pretty as though Ramirez himself had set it for him.

He might get back to the cave by retracing his steps toward the ravine he had just left and find another route across the island, but this after a moment he rejected as being almost impossible.

He was not familiar with this part of the island and he knew that the damage done by the earthquake had made some sections of it impassable. It was getting near morning too, and it would never do to be found wandering about this part of the island after daybreak.

Someway he must get back to the cave and warn his unsuspecting comrades. Someway he must get across that swirling lagoon. Once on the other side, the rest would be simple. He had only to follow the shore to reach the cave.

But once more the problem confronted him. How to cross that narrow stretch of water. The water was probably swarming with sharks. He could not hope to get a third, no, not even a quarter, of the way across the death stretch without meeting a most horrible fate. And yet his comrades must be warned!

He gazed up at the stars as though seeking some help from them. But they looked down at him unblinkingly, far away, remote, cold. He could expect no help from them.

Although the night was breathlessly hot,

Phil shivered. He stared at the narrow, menacing lagoon as though it fascinated him. He made a step toward it, then stopped as something wound and clung about his foot.

He stooped to disentangle himself and his groping fingers found themselves buried in wet seaweed. Suddenly, with the swiftness of inspiration, the idea came to him. It was a mad idea of course, utterly desperate, but then, his case was desperate.

There was plenty of that seaweed, great bunches of it, thrown up by the incoming tide. If he should bury himself in it, winding it about him so that he resembled a huge tangle of the stuff, might he not hope to fool the sharks? He could not fool them for long that was sure, but the lagoon was narrow. Their bewilderment might give him the chance to get across.

No sooner did Phil think of it than he began to put the idea into practice. He was feeling excited, almost elated. Now that he had a plan, no matter how dangerous, there was a great relief in being able to put it into practice.

He had no difficulting in gathering together all the sea weed needed for his purpose. Dexterously he wound it about his bodv. binding it about his waist with his belt and fastening it about his neck and arms and ankles with long strands of the grass itself.

When his work was finished, he looked like nothing so much as a huge haystack in action. The seaweed was mighty uncomfortable, its dampness penetrating his clothes and the sharp edges pricking his skin where it was exposed.

"I hope I can manage to keep afloat with all this cargo aboard me," he said grimly to himself as he paused on the edge of that death stretch, gathering courage to fling himself into its shark-infested waters. "Now for it—and here's trusting to luck that I ever come out of it."

He tried to speak lightly, more for the sake of his own encouragement than anything else, but as he slowly waded into the water he knew that the adventure he was entering upon might very well be his last.

Slowly, with infinite caution, he waded into the water till it was about his waist, then slowly raised his feet and lowered his arms till he lay face downward, swaying with the motion of the water.

Never before in his life had he done anything as hard as that. As long as he was on his feet, it seemed there was the chance to fight. But lying there like this, at the mercy of those giant pirates of the sea! He shivered and still lay motionless.

Then quietly, very gently, so as not to arouse the suspicion of his enemies, he began

to move his arms, then his legs, ever so slowly, so that the motion was scarcely noticeable in the swirling of the water.

Before him, beside him, everywhere around him, flashed the sinister fins of sharks. Puzzled, they swam closely about this queer object that looked like seaweed but that moved as though it had life.

Phil hardly breathed. It seemed to him as though even his heart had stopped beating. The shore—would he never reach it? He did not even dare to lift his head to see.

CHAPTER XXIV

Cheating the Sharks

An immenstiy of stars glittering in the sky, staring indifferently down upon an endless waste of water, and upon this waste of water, close up toward the shore, a little clump of seaweed, agitated by the motion of the sea.

Inside the covering of seaweed which was so slight a protection against the danger that menaced him on every side, Phil made his tedious, nightmare journey toward the farther side of the lagoon.

The bodies of the sharks edged in closer. They were becoming bolder as their suspicions grew. They could smell the unmistakable odor of human flesh and they could not much longer be denied.

Knowing this, Phil had a mad desire to throw all caution to the winds and swim rapidly toward the safety of the beach. However, he knew that the moment he gave way to this desire the suspicion of the sharks would change to certainty. And the instant that happened all chance of escape would be gone.

He turned sick as he felt the hideous creatures nosing at his disguise. They were pressing so close upon him that it was all he could do to make any progress at all. They were becoming bolder with each second. Just a little while more and it would be all over. Over—Phil repeated to himself, trying to gather fortitude to meet his fate.

He thought of the fellows, Jack Benton and poor old Bimbo. In one agonizing moment there came to him the realization of what would happen to them when he did not come to warn them of the danger lurking on the island.

They would search for him, of course. His disappearance would always be a mystery to them. They would not have time to think much about him though—again that blood-curdling, inquisitive pressure against his sides, his legs, his hands. They were closing in—closing in—his body was cold and numb—he wondered if he were dying—he could hardly move his hand—closing in—closing in—he shivered convulsively—then—what was that?

He could not have been mistaken. His knee had struck bottom. He had reached shallow water! The renewed hope that flooded him was like pain. If he reached his foot downward he could touch bottom—stand up.

Without stopping to think, acting merely

upon a quick impulse born of desperation, he sprang upright, splashing madly about him.

The ruse worked. The sharks, momentarily puzzled and bewildered by his quick action, drew back. That was all Phil wanted. With a wild shout he sprang forward, and a moment later felt the sand beneath his feet.

He staggered a few feet and then fell down in the sand, half-crazed with joy. He stripped off the clinging seaweed and half-buried his shivering body in the sand, letting handfuls of it slip through his fingers for the sheer delight of feeling it and knowing that he was safe. Never would he be again any closer to death than he had been in the last hideous few minutes. His escape seemed a miracle. He could scarcely believe yet that he was safe.

For a long time he lay there, gazing up at the stars, the warmth of the sand comforting his chilled body, luxuriating in the mere fact of living.

Then as he became quiet and the strength came back to him, the faint gray of dawn coloring the horizon in the east warned him that he must get back to the cave.

What had he been thinking of, wasting all this precious time when he should be back there warning his comrades, putting them on their guard!

As he scrambled to his feet, brushing the

sand from him, he was conscious of a queer glow of exultation. The blood was pounding once more warmly through his veins. In spite of the tremendous odds against him he had come safely through that death-haunted lagoon. By means of strategy he had outwitted the monster fish, any one of which could have ended his life with one snap of his murderous jaws.

He had braved one of the worst dangers that can confront a man and now he was safe, free to warn his comrades of danger, free to ward off the attacks of Ramirez and his men, free to guard the treasure from all comers.

No wonder he was exultant. He raised his arms above his head and gazed up at the star-gemmed sky.

"The treasure is ours," he cried aloud to the night. "I'd like to see anyone get it away from us."

And with this challenge he turned and hurried toward the cave. By the time he reached it, it was almost morning.

As he stopped at the mouth of the cave it seemed impossible, after all that had happened to him, that the boys could still be sleeping soundly. While he had been making his tremendous discovery, been fighting his fight with death, they had slept on without ever a worry to disturb their dreams.

"They're going to wake up now, just the same," he muttered. "They've had all the sleep they're going to have for one night."

Whereupon he shook Dick by the shoulder, calling upon him urgently to give up slumber and come back to earth.

"Say, what's the matter with you?" groaned Dick, trying to shake off Phil's grip of his shoulder. "We only just got to bed. Don't you know that?"

"Snap out of it," retorted Phil and there was a note in his voice that caused Dick to blink at him owlishly. "When you hear what I have to tell you, you'll agree with me that this is no time for sleeping!"

One after another, the boys roused up, helped no doubt by the urgent quality in Phil's voice. When they were awake enough to know what he was talking about he began swiftly to tell them of his adventure.

At his first words, they forgot all about their desire to go back to bed. Bimbo had lit the one lamp their quarters boasted and in the light of this they stared at Phil as though they thought he were weaving fairy stories for their benefit.

"Ramirez—on this island," said Tom, dazedly. "How did he get here?"

"How many men were there with him, Phil?" asked Jack Benton quietly. In the light

of the lamp his eyes glowed and his lips were set in a straight line.

"About nineteen or twenty, I should say," returned Phil, adding with a grim smile, "If the fellow is dead that Ramirez took a shot at that makes one less against us, anyway."

"It's—it's hard to realize yet," said Tom, softly. "How could they have been here all the time on the island and we not know about it? It seems as if we must have heard something or seen something—"

"I did," Phil interrupted him. "But when I told you about it, you wouldn't believe me."

"You mean that shot you thought you heard?" broke in Steve excitedly.

"The shot I'm sure I heard, you mean," Phil corrected, and then went on to tell about the first time he thought he had caught sight of a man slipping from the cave. "I thought at the time, I must have dreamed it," he finished. "But now of course I know it was as real as my adventure to-night."

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" asked Dick, who was always eager for action. "Why couldn't we make a surprise attack upon those ruffians and clean them out—"

"It's nearly morning," Phil interrupted the wild scheme. "By the time we reached them they'd probably be up and stirring and your surprise would come to nothing. Beside," he

added with an unpleasant memory of the lagoon, "we would have to wait till the tide went out, anyway. We'd have to swim a stretch of about fifty yards of water that's packed full of sharks."

He had not told them yet about his narrow escape from death and now Jack Benton leaned forward, intense interest on his face.

"Then how did you get here?" he demanded.

"I *swam* that fifty yards of water," Phil answered, quietly.

CHAPTER XXV

In Deadly Danger

It took the boys a moment or two to catch the full significance of this simple question and answer. Phil never boasted of his exploits. He never spoke of them unless directly questioned.

But suddenly they realized just what his simple answer meant. He had swum safely through fifty yards of shark-infested water! Impossible. It couldn't be done.

"Listen Phil," cried Steve, eagerly, "Don't kid us, old boy. You couldn't pull off a stunt like that and live to tell the tale. It just isn't being done."

"The sharks were dead ones," suggested Tom, skeptically.

"I wish they had been," Phil returned. "I'd have been saved a lot of bother. Tying myself up in that slimy wet seaweed wasn't exactly my idea of fun."

"Seaweed," repeated Tom while the boys looked more and more mystified. "What do you mean—seaweed?"

Then Phil quickly sketched for them that nightmare journey across the shark-infested lagoon. They drank in his words eagerly, living over with him every moment of that hideous experience.

When he had finished they stared at him with eyes in which there was admiration and a new respect. Bimbo, who, all during the recital, had been edging nearer his idol, now crouched beside him, looking up into Phil's face adoringly, even while he shook with fright.

"Seaweed," muttered Jack Benton. "Now who, but you, would have thought of that, Phil? It's a clever idea, all right."

"It was a lucky one," said Phil. "It sure had those maneaters guessing, all right. But now," he added, going back to the danger which menaced them in the shape of Ramirez and his men, "we've got to get busy and hide the treasure. From what I saw last night, that gang of his won't be held off much longer. For all I know they may attack this morning."

"At any rate, we'll have to be prepared for them," agreed Jack Benton, rising as he spoke. "As you say, the first thing is to dispose of the treasure."

So in the ghostly first light of the early dawn, the boys filed out of the cave armed with pickaxe and shovel, determined to put the

boxes with their precious contents safely out of harm's way.

As Tom had said, it was hard for them to realize that Phil's strange story was actual fact. They had gone to sleep the night before so secure in their possession of the treasure. It seemed impossible that now not only it, but their own lives, as well, were menaced.

But Phil, who had discovered the danger and had no doubts whatever as to the reality of it, worked like a beaver, driving them on mercilessly whenever they stopped to take breath.

"We can rest all we want to, afterward," he reminded them when they protested. "But now our job is to get these chests out of sight and be mighty quick about it. Hi there, Steve, heave to, my lad. You're wasting time!"

They had chosen a spot for the burying of the chests quite a distance from the cave but not so far but what they could "keep an eye" upon the place.

When they had finished and pounded the disturbed earth down hard over the great hole that contained such riches they scattered stones and twigs over it with apparent carelessness so that when the task was completed to their satisfaction, there was nothing to distinguish the spot from the surrounding scenery.

"There," said Phil, drawing a great breath of relief. "Now I guess we can take time for some breakfast. I'm about famished."

As the boys found themselves in the same sad fix they returned to the cave, relieved Bimbo of guard duty—a revolver had been thrust into the darky's hands but it is doubtful if he would have had the courage to use it in case of necessity—and commanded him to "rustle some grub."

This Bimbo did willingly, glad to escape to the comparative safety of the cave's interior.

"Poor Bimbo," observed Dick, as he examined his revolver to make sure it was ready for action. "Something tells me he isn't enjoying himself the way he should."

Steve grinned, but the grin quickly changed to a more serious expression.

"Say, Phil," he said, uneasily, "Don't you think we'd better scout about a bit and find out if there's anybody spying on us? All the time we were burying the treasure I felt as though someone were looking on."

Phil shook his head.

"I don't think so," he said.

"Then you don't think they'll attack right away?" put in Dick quickly.

Again Phil shook his head.

"I think Ramirez has them pretty well under his thumb," he said. "They won't dare to carry

mutiny very far. And as for Ramirez himself, he's a pretty cautious rascal—and a greedy one too. He must have spent a good deal of his time around these diggings. At the moment we brought in the treasure he was hiding somewhere nearby. Later he came so close to the cave that he listened in on our conversation."

The boys looked startled and glanced about them uneasily. The sun had risen flamingly giving promise of another fine day, but even its bright rays did not do much to lessen the uncomfortable feeling that someone was lurking near, spying upon them.

"The rat!" muttered Dick under his breath. "How much did he hear, Phil?"

"Enough," Phil answered earnestly, "to make him sure that we had not only found the treasure but that there was still more to come. That's his chief reason for not wiping us off the map at once."

"Wants us to do the work eh,?" said Jack Benton. "And then when we've recovered all the treasure for him—which feat he couldn't hope to accomplish for himself, not having the necessary equipment—he'll get rid of us and triumphantly carry off the treasure?"

Phil smiled grimly.

"Almost his very words," he said.

"Well," Steve fingered his trusty revolver, resolutely, "I have an idea he won't find it quite

as easy as he thinks for. We'll give him a good fight for his money anyway."

"For our money, you mean," corrected Tom with a grin.

"I was a fool to think we had seen the last of that scoundrel, Ramirez," said Jack Benton, moodily. "The smell of gold to that kind of scum is like raw meat to a pack of wolves. Of course it was he that shadowed us in San Domingo. On the strength of his story of treasure, it would have been the easiest thing in the world to gather about him a band of desperate men, ready for any illegitimate adventure. They have chartered some sort of ship and followed us here. Simplest thing in the world."

"You bet," agreed Phil. "And now they think they have everything their own way. They know now certainly there is a treasure and though they know it is temporarily in our possession—"

"Temporarily—say, where do you get that stuff?" demanded Steve indignantly. "You don't suppose they've got a change in the world of getting that gold away from us, do you?"

"No, I don't," said Phil, adding soberly. "But it won't do for us to forget for a minute, that they are twenty against our six."

"Five and a half, you mean," said Tom with a grin as he thought of Bimbo. "I imagine old Bimbo—" But Phil sent him a warning

glance as the black boy himself appeared in the door to announce that "breffus done been prepared dis long time. Done nobody else wanna eat it Ah will, yassir, Ah's one hungry nigger!"

Phil insisted on keeping watch while the other boys ate and no amount of argument could move him from his stand. However, Dick hastily finished his breakfast and relieved the famished Phil.

As soon as they had fortified themselves with food, they set about to barricade the cave. For, as Phil had said, the odds were tremendously on the side of Ramirez and his men and in order to overcome these odds it was necessary that their position be strongly fortified.

They barricaded the mouth of the cave, leaving a gap only wide enough for one person to squeeze through with difficulty. They were careful to leave peep holes, however, through which they might watch the movements of the enemy.

A heavy stone had been rolled inside the cave so that even the narrow aperture might be blocked up if it became necessary.

"There," said Phil, grimly as he regarded the operations. "Now let 'em come on."

CHAPTER XXVI

The Volcano Wakes

Then began the hardest part of it all for the boys—the waiting part. There was no telling what time Ramirez and his men might take for the attack so that all they could expect to do was to keep a close guard upon the cave and—wait.

They thought constantly of the rest of the treasure which still lay in the hold of the sunken ship. If only they had been able to recover the remainder of those precious chests before they had learned of the new danger that threatened them!

Dick was for going ahead anyway on the chance that Ramirez would not attack that day. But the rest were all against such a wild plan.

"There is no use risking what treasure we have already—as well as our lives," said Phil. "What's to prevent Ramirez and his men from sneaking up while we were out there on the raft and barring our way back to shore? with the heavy odds against us, what chance would we have?"

"We'd have the choice," Steve took up the argument, "of pitting our six men against their twenty or staying out on the raft to starve or be caught in one of the sudden storms that we have around here and drown—"

"Later to be eaten by the sharks," finished Tom, gloomily, and at this even Dick seemed convinced that the part of wisdom would be to stick close to the shore.

All day long they kept guard, ready at the first sign of attack to make for the barricaded cave, thus more or less evening the odds against them.

They were confident of being able to rout the enemy. It was only the delay that worried.

"Why don't they get busy?" cried Dick, pacing up and down, his hands shoved savagely in his pockets. "I can stand anything but this waiting game. If they don't start something pretty soon, I'm going to take my gun and do a little war dance over to their part of the island all by myself if nobody else will come with me."

"Like fun you are," said Phil quietly. "We can't leave the treasure unguarded. You know that."

This seemed to give Dick pause but almost immediately he began his restless pacing up and down again.

"Then why don't they get busy?" he de-

manded again, as though in some mysterious way the delay were all Phil's fault.

"Probably," Phil answered, his gaze fixed on the lowering mountain where it towered far above them, "they are taking it easy to-day. They naturally think that in this fine weather we'd be out hunting the rest of the treasure. Probably Ramirez or one of his buddies will be sneaking around this evening to see what we've got."

"I suppose so," returned Dick and then he followed the direction of Phil's gaze, his eyes coming to rest on the dark cloud that hovered close above the mountain.

"The old boy looks pretty bad, doesn't he?" Dick remarked, anxiously.

Phil nodded.

"Getting worse and worse all the time," he said, adding with a grin as he drew his gaze down from the mountain, "Looks as if we were hedged in between two fires. We'll have to be pretty spry on our feet if we don't get burned by one or the other of them."

"I'll tell the world," said Tom ruefully. He had come out of the cave just in time to hear Phil's last sentence. "If old Ramirez doesn't get us, the mountain will. Bimbo says that old boy is getting ready to spill a lot of lava on us."

"Which old boy, Ramirez or the mountain?"

asked Tom, trying to be funny and only getting a pitying stare for his pains.

"So Bimbo says we're going to have an eruption, does he?" remarked Phil, adding softly, as though speaking to himself, "Well, a little while ago I wouldn't have paid much attention to what Bimbo said. But now it's different. He said there wasn't any luck for us on this island, and I'm beginning to believe him."

"How about the treasure?" asked Jack Benton and Phil turned on him with a grin.

"We didn't find that on the island," he reminded him. "We found it under the sea!"

And so the long hot day wore on and nothing happened except that that menacing cloud over the mountain grew darker and darker. Toward the middle of the afternoon there came a slight earthquake shock, not severe enough to cause them any great alarm. Just the same it might be noticed that they gazed oftener and more anxiously at the threatening mountain.

Needless to wish now as they had wished so many times before that they had not lost their good ship on the treacherous rocks. If they had any kind of water-tight craft, large enough for them to set sail in, it would be so easy to outwit Ramirez and his gang now that they knew of his villainous plans. They could not recover the rest of the treasure, perhaps,

but they could at least make sure of what they had.

Poor Bimbo was anything but happy. Nearly all the day he hugged the cave as though that were his only refuge. Once or twice he ventured forth, and on those occasions he seemed to be doing his best to keep his eyes from wandering to the lowering mountain and the cloud of smoke that hung low above it. Then, as though drawn by a magnet, his gaze would come round to it and with an ejaculation of terror he would duck for the cave once more.

The boys, watching him, laughed, even while his fright made them uneasy.

"I believe he's more afraid of that mountain than he is of Ramirez and all his gang," said Jack Benton one one of these occasions. "Poor Bimbo. I'm afraid he won't be much help to us when the need for action comes."

"Well I don't know about that," Phil disagreed with him. "He wouldn't be a bit of good with a rifle—I doubt if he would even know how to fire one—but when it comes to a knife or a club, he'll come in mighty handy."

"Well, we'll see," said Benton absently, and once more his eyes turned to the mountain.

"Phil," he said, after a minute, "I believe Bimbo's right. Have you noticed any change in that smoke cloud lately?"

Phil nodded gravely.

"It's been spreading and growing blacker for a long while," he said. "Something tells me that this island is going to be a pretty unhealthy place to live on before long."

Jack Benton spread his hands in a helpless gesture.

"What are we going to do?" he asked.

At that moment, as though he had heard the question and were trying to supply the answer, Bimbo ventured forth from the cave once more and approacched Phil. He kept glancing over his shoulder at the mountain continually and his teeth chattered as he made his proposition.

"Ah jes' done think o' somethin', Marse Phil," he said. "An' Ah jes' been wonderin' why nobuddy haint thought o' it afore. Dat radio stuff what yo' all sets sech store by—Ah asks what good it am, Marse Phil, ef it don' git us out o' dis fix we're in. Ef you kin talk over it, reckon dis yere's de time to talk. Anyways, 'pears like to me, Marse Phil."

It was a long speech for Bimbo, and at the end of it he drew a long breath, gazing at Phil with eager expectancy. Evidently he had expected his suggestion to be received with open arms.

An expression of dire disappointment spread over his black face as Phil slowly shook his head.

"We've thought of that, Bimbo," he said. "But it won't do to let outsiders in on this just now. If we should radio a ship for help, we would have to explain about the treasure, and that would never do. No, I guess we'll have to stick it out for the present. We always have radio as a last resort, you know," he added, by way of cheering the disconsolate Bimbo, as the latter turned slowly away.

"Anyways Ah done did the best Ah could," he muttered. "Ef Ah had the workin' o' dat radio Ah wouldn't be waitin' for no las' resort, nosir, not wiv dat dere mountain cuttin' up pranks."

But in spite of the heavy odds against them and the double danger in which they knew they stood the boys were firm in their decision not to radio for help, unless their position became absolutely desperate.

Unless Ramirez delayed his attack too long they were confident, with the aid of the barricaded cave that they could put their enemy to rout in spite of the difference in numbers. Then, the island once clean of Ramirez and his men, they could let shipwreck account for their presence on the island, meanwhile thinking up some plan for getting the treasure aboard without rousing the suspicion of their rescuers.

But that mountain! Blacker and blacker

became the smoke cloud. As night fell, little tongues of flame could be seen shooting from the crater's mouth, vivid streaks of light against the darkening sky. Through the earth shot sickening tremors, rocking the ground beneath their feet. The air was heavy and breathless and into it insidiously crept the smell of sulphur.

It seemed to the boys as if they could not breathe. They longed for a clean wind from the sea but none came to relieve them. It was as though all nature held itself in suspense, awaiting some tremendous climax, some terrific convulsion of its elements.

The boys waited, drawn close together, watching that ominous flickering of flame, fascinated, feeling as though they were under some sort of horrid spell, unable to drag their eyes away. Bimbo, crouched in a far corner of the cave was praying wildly.

It was long past dinner time, yet no one thought of eating. Who could think of food when they believed they were facing destruction?

How long they stood there, motionless, it would be hard to tell. Hours they must have been and yet to the boys, they passed like minutes.

The tremors of the earth became harder, more frequent, the heavy air became filled with

the sickening sulphur smell. It was hot—hot. Their throats ached with the heat. The air was thick with flying particles—lava.

Phil touched the sleeve of his shirt wonderingly and looked at his fingers. They were covered with dust. He looked at his companions. They were covered with dust. He wanted to laugh, they looked so funny—like figures made out of dust. But something kept him from doing that. Perhaps it was the dryness of his throat.

His eyes came back to those darts of fire, higher now, flaming more vividly against the darker sky, gorgeous, soul-shaking.

Something reached out and touched his arm. He looked down and found it was Dick's hand. He grasped it and the two looked at each other, silently. They didn't speak. They didn't need to speak. Their silence said more than words. In the hearts of both of them was the thought that perhaps they would not see another sunrise—.

"Look," cried Steve, his voice sounding thin and strange. "The mountain—"

A liquid stream of fire shooting from the crater's mouth straight into the heavens, a terrific jar that shook the island from end to end, great, new-made fissures, yawning horribly, a mass of molten lava raining down the mountain slope.

A second quake more awful than the first, a grinding, breaking noise as though the island sank into the sea. Thrown from his feet, Phil struck his head upon a stone.

"It's—the end," he muttered, and sank into oblivion.

Ages later he opened his eyes and looked into the fear-crazed ones of Bimbo. The darky was bathing the blood that flowed from the wound in his scalp. Behind him, in the light of the lantern, he saw the strained faces of his comrades.

"I don' think you was killed, Marse Phil," blubbered Bimbo. "You bleed like you was ram' by a bull. Thank de Lord you'se alive, Marse Phil."

Phil sat up, brushing Bimbo away impatiently. He was still dizzy and it was hard to think clearly.

"Is—the island—still here?" he asked, incredulously.

Jack Benton laughed shakily, bending over him.

"Yes and so are we—yet," he said. "Are you well enough to stand, Phil?"

Phil found that he was and between them he walked to the door of the cave and out into the sultry night.

Everything was quiet, as though the tremendous spectacle had never been. Only now

and again a flame shot out from the mouth of the crater, a promise of future destruction.

From within the cave came Bimbo's mournful wail: "Ef we don' git away from dis yere island we'll all go to de bottom of de sea. Yassir, dats where we're agwine."

Phile turned his eyes from a new-made fissure yawning at his feet out to the limitless sea. The throbbing of the pain in his head seemed to keep time with the monotony of the waves as they pounded upon the shore.

CHAPTER XXVII

On the Alert

The night of terror had been a severe strain on the boys, and, coupled with the loss of sleep, made them feel completely fagged the next morning. Nature had seemed to be in league with their human enemies. Either would have been formidable enough alone, but combined they presented a grim problem that it would tax all their resources to meet and overcome.

But there was no relaxation in their determination to defend themselves to the last gasp. No one of them yielded to panic fears. They might go down, but if they did they would go down fighting.

"There's one benefit anyway that this eruption has brought us," remarked Benton, as they were dispatching a hasty breakfast.

"That's what I call looking on the bright side of things with a vengeance," remarked Dick. "I can't think of a single thing besides trouble that it means to us."

"What I mean is this," explained Benton.

"Up to now we haven't been at all certain as to when the bandits would attack us. It might be in a week, it might be in a month. But now we know for certain. They'll try to rush us tonight as sure as shooting."

"You must be the seventh son of a seventh son to fix the time so precisely," observed Tom.

"I see where Jack is right," exclaimed Phil. "It's been all that Ramirez could do to hold his men in check so far. He's done it by sheer force. But after last night there'll be no use trying to keep them in. They'll be terror-stricken and want to get off the island just as soon as possible. But of course they won't go until they have a hack at the treasure. It's a dead certainty that they'll come for it tonight."

Tom and Dick yielded to the force of the reasoning.

"That being so," said Benton, "it's up to us to get busy, for we're going to have about the hardest day's work we ever did. They're figuring on a surprise. Well, they'll get it all right, but it won't be the kind they're looking for.

"We've already got our weapons in good condition," Benton went on, "and we don't need to pay much more attention to them. But the odds against us are heavy and we've got to employ strategy. In the first place we'll

strengthen our barricades. Then we'll put into play something that I learned in the war. It's a mighty lucky thing that we brought along plenty of blasting powder and dynamite when we started on this trip."

"Going to use the sticks of dynamite as sort of hand grenades?" asked Dick.

"Better than that," Benton answered. "I'm going to concentrate them in a mine that I hope will blow the rascals to kingdom come.

"Now here's what I have in mind. We'll dig a pit about three feet deep at a place twenty-five or thirty feet in front of the cave. This we'll stack with blasting powder and dynamite. Then we'll dig a small conduit, along which we'll run a wire connecting with the explosives and running back to the cave. When the proper moment comes and the largest crowd is just above the pit, we'll send a spark along the wire. And I think that will be about all. It'll probably put a lot of them out of business, and the rest will be so terrified and confused that they'll probably make tracks to the other end of the island and get away from it as soon as possible. What do you think of it?"

"It's a dandy plan," cried Phil with enthusiasm.

"It sure ought to turn the trick," exclaimed Dick.

"It'll be an artificial earthquake that will be

worse for those scoundrels than the real thing," jubilated Tom.

"I'm glad we're all agreed," said Benton with a gratified smile. "Now then let's pitch in and get the thing started. There's a good deal to be done, and we've got to be especially careful about connecting the explosives with the wire so that there won't be any fizzle when the time comes. We'll work in relays and stand guard turn and turn about. We've got to keep a strict watch, for while I don't think they'll attack us before nightfall, you never can tell."

They started in to work at once, and toiled under the tropical sun until the perspiration rolled from them in streams. By the early afternoon, the work was completed to their satisfaction. The mine was laid, as was also the wire leading through a narrow trench to the cave, where it was connected with the battery of the radio set. Great care was taken to restore the ground to its former apparent condition, for although it was unlikely that in the night it would be under special scrutiny they could afford to take no chances. Leaves were scattered over the pit and the path of the wire, and by the time they were through they could not themselves have detected anything unusual in the appearance of the ground.

"A good job," pronounced Benton, as he scanned it with a critical. "Now let them

come as soon as they like, and I imagine they'll go away quicker than they came. That is, those of them who can get away."

The boys in their turn at sentry duty had seen nothing suspicious. Not an unusual sound or sight had come within their range, though they had watched and listened with the intensity of those who knew that their lives might pay the forfeit of the least carelessness.

Nature too seemed to have relapsed into quiet. The mountain still smoked and there were ocasional rumblings, while at times the earth trembled. But the giant of the volcano, if not sleeping soundly was at least dozing, and the boys took heart of hope from this circumstance. Human enemies they might fight, but before the unleashed forces of nature they were helpless.

Bimbo had prepared a good meal, and the boys after their hard work fell to with zest.

"Lay into it, boys," said Benton approvingly. "Hungry men can't fight well. It was Napoleon you know who said that an army was like a snake—it moved along on its stomach."

They needed no urging, and Bimbo, despite his apprehension, grinned with satisfaction at the tribute paid to his cooking.

The long afternoon dragged on, the hours seeming all the longer because they had nothing to do but wait. And waiting was vastly more trying than working, for they had nothing

to distract their minds from the ordeal that was coming.

They welcomed the shadows when they began to creep along the western sky. Twilight deepened into darkness. There was no moon, and the only light there was came from the stars.

Still the attack was delayed. An hour passed on and then another. Had they been mistaken then in believing that the struggle would come that night?

"Not at all," affirmed Benton, when Dick had expressed a doubt. "They're simply waiting until they think we're fast asleep and they can bag us without having to do much fighting. They're mighty careful of their precious skins."

It lacked about half an hour of midnight when Phil, who had been on sentry duty, came slipping into the cave as silently as a panther.

"I think they're coming," he announced in a voice little above a whisper. "I heard the crackling of twigs, and in a flare of light that came from the volcano I saw moving bodies some distance off in the woods. They'll probably be here in ten minutes."

After the long period of waiting the news brought positive relief. Here at least was a promise of action.

"Don't fire until I give the word," ordered Benton, as he disposed his little force to the best advantage. "Keep under cover as well as you

can and make every shot tell. A good deal depends upon the hot reception we give them at the start. You, Phil, keep your finger near the key of the battery and be ready to press it on the instant."

When all was ready a stillness as of death prevailed in the cave. With every sense on the alert, their ears strained and their eyes trying to pierce the darkness, the boys lay outstretched, their weapons in their hands, their blood racing madly through their veins, their hearts trumping in excitement.

Then minutes passed—then twenty—thirty. Then to their ears came faint rustlings, and they thought, though they were not sure, that they could see shadowy forms stealing about from tree to tree like so many phantoms.

A period of absolute silence ensued. Then suddenly there rose a wild yell, a volley of bullets whistled over their heads and pattered against the stones of the barricade, and from all directions the outlaws came rushing toward the cave!

CHAPTER XXVIII

A Flag of Truce

Phil's finger rested lightly on the key of the battery, ready to send the current through the wire at the word of command. But the word did not come.

For the first rush of the attackers had not been made in a mass. On the contrary they came in open order seeming to spring up from the ground at various points. At no moment were enough of them concentrated on or about where the mine was located to justify springing the mine. That must be reserved until it could be most effective.

Benton saw this like a flash and changed his tactics.

"Fire!" he roared, and instantly sheets of flame came from the weapons of the besieged.

The effect was instantaneous. Two of the attacking party staggered and fell and the rest stopped short in their tracks. They had evidently expected to find their intended victims asleep and the answering volley halted them as though it had been a thunderbolt. One or two

of them made as though they would still come on, but the others wavered and then fell back to the shelter of the woods dragging their wounded comrades with them.

"First blood for us," said Benton grimly. "Any of you boys hurt?"

"No," came in a chorus, in which jubilation was the dominant note.

"Good!" exclaimed Benton with vast relief. "They can't say as much, for we've put two of them at least out of business."

"Wonder how they liked the little surprise party," chuckled Dick.

"Not very much I imagine," answered Benton. "But stay under cover and keep your guns fully loaded. This fight isn't over by a long shot. We've won the first round and balked them for the time, but they'll come back. They've got too much at stake to give it up, and they know they outnumber us four to one."

For the next half hour scattering shots kept coming from the woods, but the boys kept well under cover and the bullets whistled harmlessly against the rocks.

It was hard to lie quiet and not reply, but Benton's orders were imperative.

"Let them shoot," he said. "They're only wasting their ammunition, and there's no reason why we should do the same. Besides our absolute silence gets more on their nerves than

if we answered. But they'll hear noise enough when they come on again."

Another half hour passed, and then a hail came from the blackness of the woods and they could just catch a glimpse of something white like a handkerchief that was thrust on a stick from behind a tree.

"Ahoy there," came a voice. "I want to talk with you."

"Oh you do, do you," called Benton sarcastically. "Why didn't you say so before? I thought that what you wanted was to cut our throats."

"No," came the voice. "We were not going to do you any harm. All that we wanted was to get the treasure, which belongs to us as much as it does to you."

"That's interesting," replied Benton, "seeing that we got it and you didn't. But if you've got anything to say, you infernal scoundrel, come out here in the open and say it."

"And your men will not shoot?" asked the voice.

"No," answered Benton, "not unless you try any treachery, and then may heaven have mercy on you for we won't."

A figure emerged from behind the tree and still holding the flag of truce came toward them. Benton halted him when he had come within ten feet of the cave.

"Stand right where you are," he commanded. "And remember, Ramirez, that we have you covered, and at the least sign of any crooked business you're a dead man. Now get on with your palaver, for you're breaking into my night's sleep."

If Benton expected that his coolness would daunt the rascal, he counted without his host, for the latter betrayed no signs of trepidation.

"So you know my name?" he queried, with a faint tinge of surprise.

"Just as well as you know mine," replied Benton. "We've been keeping tabs on you and your gang just as you have on us. You didn't know that you were followed the other night, did you? You didn't know that one of our men concealed in the bushes heard your plans and saw you shoot one of your men, did you?"

Ramirez gritted his teeth, and a smothered oath came from his lips.

"You see we're onto you," said Benton, "and that's how it came about that we had this little surprise cooked up for you tonight. Too bad that you didn't find us sound asleep, wasn't it? That's your long suit, you know, creeping into places where people are asleep. You remember how you worked it when you tried to steal the papers from my tent."

"It's a lie," ejaculated Ramirez sullenly.

"Well, you're an expert liar and ought to

know," retorted Benton. "But get on with what you want to say and then clear out. You're a blot on the landscape and it makes me tired to look at you."

"These are big words," sneered Ramirez, "but they are only what you Americanos call the bluff. We hold your lives in our hands, just like that," and he snapped his fingers.

"Really?" answered Benton. "Now that's news to me. But perhaps you have advance information. What makes you think you have a strangle hold on us?"

"You have only five men, besides a negro and he doesn't count," replied Ramirez. "I have twenty, four times as many."

"You had twenty perhaps," said Benton, "but I think you lost a couple of them a little while ago. And I shouldn't wonder but what you'd lose more before the night is over. And remember, Ramirez, that the men behind me are white, while your rascals are mostly half breeds like yourself. You've seen enough of white men in San Domingo to know what that means."

"A bullet will kill a white man just as easily as it will a black," Ramirez retorted. "You have no chance. I may lose some of my men, but in the long run we will be too many for you."

"Well, if you're so sure of that, why do you waste your time talking," responded Benton.

"Why don't you come and wipe us out?"

"Because there is a better way," was the answer. "There is no need of any of us being killed. I come to offer terms to you."

"And what are those terms?" asked Benton, seeking to lead the rascal on.

"In the first place, I will spare your lives," began Ramirez.

"That's sweet of you," interposed Benton. "What else?"

"And I will give you a part of the treasure," went on Ramirez. "I will give you passage on my boat to San Domingo and there leave you free to go where you will. I swear this on my honor."

Benton laughed.

"Your honor," he repeated with withering contempt. "Why, you lying, thieving, murderous halfbred, you don't even know the meaning of the word. Within five minutes after we had surrendered, you would have cut our throats, laughing all the while at the fool Americanos who were so easily cheated. I know you from top of your head to the sole of your foot, and you're scoundrel clear through."

Ramirez flew into a fury.

"You refuse then?" he cried, stamping his foot and raising his hand in a threatening gesture.

"Of course I refuse," replied Benton. "Now,

you skunk, get this straight. Go back to your murderous gang and do your worst. We will give you all the fighting that you want. And I tell you right now that we're going to whip you to a frazzle."

Ramirez, seeing that his lies had no effect, lost all control of himself. A stream of imprecations broke from his lips.

"So it shall be then," he shouted. "War to the death. You were right when you said that I would have cut your throats. But I will do more than that. I will torture you until you shall pray for death. I will—"

"There now, cut it short, Ramirez," Benton commanded curtly. "I'll give you just one minute to get back to shelter. If you're not there in that time, there'll be one less villain in the world."

For a moment it seemed as though Ramirez in his rage would defy the command, but discretion conquered and he went hurriedly back to the refuge of the trees, still heaping maledictions on the heads of his enemies.

"Gee, but the old boy is eloquent," muttered Tom to Phil.

"Seems real peeved, doesn't he?" laughed Phil in return. "What he thinks of Benton isn't fit for publication."

"He must have thought we were easy marks to be taken in by that mass of lies," remarked

Dick. "Do you see how he threw off the mask when he saw it was of no use, and admitted that he had intended to cut our throats, just as Benton said?"

"The black-hearted rascal is bad medicine," remarked Benton. "But now we've got to prepare for the fight of our lives. It's either kill or be killed. And don't forget if it comes to a pinch that it's better to die than be captured. You heard what he said, and you know what it will mean to fall into the hands of Ramirez."

CHAPTER XXIX

A Fight for Life

The boys did not need any exhortation on the necessity of fighting to the last. They knew that the issue was fairly joined and could only be finally settled by the complete victory of one side or the other. The malignant threats of Ramirez still rang in their ears, and they had not the slightest doubt that the scoundrel would do exactly what he had stated, in case any of them were luckless enough to fall into his hands.

So they looked well to their weapons in the period of respite that ensued, and prepared for the coming onset. Yet as hour after hour passed without any move on the part of the enemy, they grew puzzled. Why was the attack delayed?

Once at some distance off in the woods they heard a shot, followed by a scream.

"Have they got to fighting among themselves, I wonder," remarked Phil.

"It would solve our problem if they'd only kill each other off like so many Kilkenny cats," said Tom.

"I guess that was Ramirez enforcing disci-

pline and killing one of his rascals to cow the others," concluded Benton. "If so, it makes one less for us to handle."

Another half hour passed, and still the attack hung fire.

"They'll have to come along pretty soon or it will be daylight, and that will be all to our advantage," muttered Benton in some perplexity at the enemy's tactics.

Just then there came a sharp exclamation from Phil. His eyes were keener than those of any of the others, and he had detected a black blur that to him indicated a massing of men.

"I think they're getting ready for a rush," he exclaimed.

The words had scarcely left his lips before they were followed by the roar of a volley, and Ramirez and his men came plunging from the woods, uttering wild yells and making straight for the entrance of the cave. This time they did not scatter, but depended on the power of their mass attack to overwhelm the little party of defenders by sheer weight of numbers.

It was a fatal mistake, for their course was taking them right over the place where the mine had been planted. Phil already had his finger on the key.

"Now!" shouted Benton, and Phil sent the spark along the wire.

There was a terrific explosion, as tons of

earth were sent hurtling upward, carrying with them the whirling, sprawling bodies of some of the attacking party. Others were sent staggering to the ground on either side of the great yawning hole that had been dug by the dynamite.

Even in the cave itself the force of the explosion was felt, and the boys were thrown from the positions in which they had ensconced themselves, while their weapons were sent clattering from their hands.

"Get ready to rush them, boys," Benton's voice rose high over the din. "It's our turn now."

The boys sprang to their feet, and followed their leader through the narrow passage between the rocks that formed the barricade.

They awaited the command to fire, but as Benton saw the devastation that had been caused by the mine, he forbore to give the order.

For the victory had already been won. The mine had done all and more than had been expected of it. It had taken all the fight out of the attacking party. Several had been killed, and the others in wild panic had sought refuge in flight. The boys could hear them plunging in a mad stampede through the underbrush, their sole anxiety to get as far away from the fatal spot as possible. In their confused minds they had probably interpreted the mine as another manifestation of the earthquake.

"No use of following them, boys," remarked

Benton, as they listened to the fugitives crashing through the bushes. "They're making tracks for their ship as fast as they know how. No doubt we could follow them and pick them off like so many rabbits, but we don't want any slaughter. What we've done has been in self defense and because we had to. And we don't want any captives either. They'd only add to our troubles and make a complicated situation."

"But don't you think that Ramirez may rally his men and make another attack?" asked Dick anxiously.

"Here's the answer to that," replied Benton, who had taken out his flashlight and was sending its rays over the bodies lying on the ground. "Here's Ramirez himself. He's done his last killing, and has met the fate that he has handed out so ruthlessly to others."

The boys crowded around him and gazed on the villainous features of the scoundrel who a few hours before had threatened them with unimaginable tortures.

"He met the fate he courted and the fate he well deserved," remarked Benton. "That settles the question of any more fighting. He was the only one in the gang that had any of the qualities of leadership and without him the rest are only a lot of panic-stricken dogs. They think the island's hoodooed, this end of it especially, and you couldn't drag them over here again with a

team of horses. No, I think our worries are over as far as those rascals are concerned. But on the mere chance that some sniper may want to take a last shot at us before scurrying off after his comrades, we'd better get back to the cave now and wait till daylight. Then we'll bury these bodies and clear up some of this debris."

Phil felt a nudge on his arm, and turning about saw Bimbo standing beside him.

"Please suh," said the negro with a note of pride in his voice," Ah's wounded."

"Is that so?" asked Phil in quick concern. "Where?"

Bimbo exhibited his knuckles, which were bleeding where they had been grazed by a bullet. Phil saw at a glance that it was nothing, but not for the world would he have taken away from Bimbo the satisfaction that the wound gave him.

"Oh, that's too bad," he said gravely, "but it's what a fighter has to expect. Come into the cave and I'll bathe and dress it for you."

Bimbo followed, his white teeth showing in a grin of pride, at the same time nursing his scratched hand and emitting an occasional groan which he thought the situation demanded.

"Mighty lucky dat de mine done got dat Ramirez fo' dis nigger got at him," he ejaculated. "Ah had him mahked fo def, an' Ah sho would huv messed him up pow'ful."

"I'm sure you would," returned Phil, keeping his face straight with difficulty. "If any of those fellows come back we'll let you have the first hack at them."

Bimbo's face fell at this.

"Yassuh, yassuh," he agreed, but with a marked loss of enthusiasm, "but af'er you, Marse Phil, af'er you an' de udder gemmun. Dis nigger knows his place, yassuh."

"And now, Bimbo," remarked Phil, after he had completed his task, "if you still feel equal to it, it might be a good thing to turn to and rustle us some grub. I guess I speak for all of us when I say that we're as hungry as wolves."

There was a universal chorus of assent. Now that the strain was over they had time to think of their material wants, and they did full justice to the abundant meal that Bimbo soon put before them.

They were tired too, desperately tired, and all would have welcomed sleep. But there was too much to do just now to think of that. By the time they had finished their meal, daylight had come, and they set to work to remove the traces of the struggle.

The deep crater dug by the mine served as a burial place, and they placed in it the bodies of the attackers. Bimbo had ventured some feeble remonstrances at having them buried so near the

cave and had hinted mysteriously at "ha'nts," but his objections were overruled.

"That dynamite has surely stood us in good stead," remarked Phil, as they smoothed out the ground after their task had been completed. "Without it we wouldn't have got the treasure and perhaps we'd have lost our lives."

"And don't forget radio," put in Dick. "If we hadn't had the batteries of the set along the dynamite wouldn't have done us any good."

"They made a good team," assented Benton. "And now before we do anything else, we'll snatch a few hours of sleep. We'll post guards and keep watch, turn and turn about."

This met with universal approval, and with the exception of the time spent in sentry duty they slept till noon and awoke refreshed and ready to resume the work of treasure hunting. They were in high spirits when Benton summoned them to a council of war.

"You know why I think the danger is over from those rascals," he said, "but a wise general never takes anything for granted. We've got to make sure as to what they are up to. So we'll have to do a little scouting. I think Phil had better come along with me, while the rest of you stay here to guard the cave and treasure. I've had a lot of experience in this kind of work in San Domingo and Phil has the advantage of having been over the ground before. We'll be off

now, and probably be back in two or three hours."

They looked well to their weapons and started off. The way was difficult, even more so than before, because of the changes made by the earthquake and volcanic eruption. In places there were streams of lava, not yet cooled, that had blasted everything in their paths. In other sections trees had been uprooted and thrown about in the wildest tangle and confusion. Many times they had to make wide detours, but each had a keen sense of direction, and they steadily pursued the general route that led to the former camp of Ramirez and his gang.

They came to the lagoon, or rather the hollow basin that formed a lagoon when the tide was in. Just now the sands were bare, but Phil could barely repress a shudder as he pointed out to his companion the place where he had had his terrible experience with the sharks. Even now he seemed to feel those horrid noses poking at him through his envelope of seaweed, and his skin prickled at the recollection.

They had reached a height of ground that commanded the sea when Benton suddenly grasped Phil's arm.

"Look!" he exclaimed, as he pointed out to sea.

A ship had just left the cove that had sheltered it and was beating its way slowly to the

open sea beyond. As they watched, another sail was run up, and under the added impetus the schooner quickened its pace and, rounding a headland, was lost to sight.

Benton and Phil looked at each other.

"They're off!" exclaimed Phil.

"Thank God!" said Benton.

CHAPTER XX X

Victory!

They went down to the place where Ramirez had made his camp. Here they found signs of haste and confusion. Utensils had been scattered about, and even some things of value left in the eagerness to be off. Evidence of panic was everywhere.

"There's been no lack of booze here at any rate," remarked Phil with a grin, as he looked about at a host of empty bottles.

"Drink and loot were their watchwords, like those of the old pirates," replied Benton. "'Heigh-O and a bottle of rum." But now let's get back to the other fellows and set their minds at rest."

Great was the jubilation among their comrades when they returned with their news. It was like the passing of a nightmare. Now they had the island to themselves, and could pursue their work without the danger of being robbed and murdered.

One anxiety yet remained. Behind them the

volcano reared its head, smoke still issuing from its cone, while every once in a while the earth shook with that dizzying, sickening motion. At any moment, giant subterranean forces might be unleashed that would mean their utter destruction.

"It's up to us to get a move on pronto," observed Phil. "It's too late now to do anything further today, but tomorrow morning early we've got to get on the job. If the volcano will only be good for a couple of weeks longer, we'll have nothing more to ask."

"If it doesn't stay good we find ourselves in a worse fix than the other fellows," said Dick. "They at least had a ship to get away in, but if we were driven from the island we'd have nothing but that little dory. And if a storm came up that wouldn't last for ten minutes. We'd lose not only the treasure but our lives."

"The thought came to me of seizing that ship after the fight this morning," said Benton. "Not exactly seizing it either, for it doesn't belong to us, but of getting possession of it long enough to put in it what treasure we've got, running it back to San Domingo where we could place it safely, and then coming back again to go on with our work. I've no doubt that in the scared state those fellows were we could have done it. But I dismissed the thought almost as soon as I had it, because it would

lead to all sorts of complications. The best use that schooner could be to us would be to get those fellows away from the island.

"But the very fact that they are away makes it necessary for us to hurry up our work," he continued. "As soon as they get back to San Domingo, they'll get talking to fellows of their own kind, the wharf rats and toughs that infest the water front. It might be an easy enough thing to get up another expedition, especially when they tell them how few we are. We'll have to scratch gravel now and make every minute tell."

They turned in early that night, in order to rise at the first streak of dawn. The hurried look they cast at the sea told them that it was scarcely disturbed by a ripple, and they looked forward to a day of fruitful work. They hastened through their breakfast and then made for the beach.

Phil was in the van, and as he reached the shore he gave a startled shout that speedily brought his comrades to his side.

There, scattered along the beach were the timbers of a ship, while other debris of a vessel, hatches, parts of masts and deck planks bobbed up and down in the surf.

They looked at each other in utter perplexity.

"Some ship must have foundered," exclaimed Dick, "and yet I don't see how that

could be. There hasn't been any big storm recently.

"An old ship it must have been too," said Tom, stooping to examine a piece of timber. "This beam is worm eaten. No wonder the old tub went to pieces. I only hope that her crew has escaped."

"They didn't escape," said Phil quietly. "The ship went down with all on board. And it went down more than two hundred years ago."

Dick jumped as though he had been shot.

"You mean, you mean—" he stammered and stopped, his brain whirling with the tumultous thoughts that surged through it.

"The old pirate ship!" gasped Tom, who had caught Phil's meaning.

"By ginger, that's what it is," cried Benton excitedly. "See," he went on, pointing to a piece of hatch. "Look at that splintered piece that has been torn off. See how new the broken place looks compared to the old. That's where it was torn apart by our charge of dynamite."

They stood for a moment as if stunned. There was something awe-inspiring in the sight of the remnants of the old ship that had come again into the sunlight after its two-hundred years' sleep on the ocean bed.

Phil was the first to break the silence.

"How could it have happened?" he asked in bewilderment.

"I think I understand," said Benton. "It's all bound up with the volcano and the earthquake. The same forces have caused an upheaval in the bed of the sea. The old ship has been close to the center of disturbance, the timbers already shattered by the dynamite have been further wrenched apart and the entire mass thrown up to the surface of the sea."

"Then that puts an end to our treasure hunting," said Phil, voicing the thought that came in the minds of all.

"It sure does," replied Benton. "Even the log that marked the position of the ship has disappeared," pointing out to the unbroken surface of the sea. "We might hunt now for a hundred years and not locate the spot. And even if we did, the treasure would have been scattered all over the sand of the ocean bed. No, the game is up. We can thank our stars that we got what we did. That is enough to make the expedition a glorious success. Perhaps after all, it's better that nature took a hand, or we might have stayed on here so long as to end in our destruction. Now let's get back to the cave and figure out our next move, for we'll have to do some quick thinking."

They retraced their steps, Bimbo keeping well abreast of them and occasionally casting frightened glances back at the fragments of the pirate ship.

"What Ah tell you, Marse Phil?" he said, as well as his chattering teeth would permit. "Dey's a spell on dis yar islan'. Nebber any good fussin' wiv daid men's bones. Nussah, deed dey ain't. Ole piyate ship come back. Bimeby dem piyate skelintons come moseyin' along too. Min' mah wuds, Marse Phil, min' mah wuds."

Phil made some laughing reply, but he was too much engrossed at the moment with the sudden change in the situation to pay much attention to Bimbo's superstitious fears, and the latter, with a shake of the head at Phil's obtuseness, retired within himself, still however keeping up his mutterings and giving a wide berth to the grave of Ramirez and his men as he approached the cave.

"Now here," said Benton, as they sat down for a conference, "is where that blessed radio of ours comes in to get us away from this island. We want to get busy right away and send out messages that will bring a ship here to take us off. Some of the ships in these waters I wouldn't want to come, for they're sailed by as precoius a gang of cutthroats as Ramirez himself. But that kind don't have a radio outfit, so we can dismiss them from consideration. Any of the liners that ply between the ports of the Caribbean would be all right. But what I would prefer above any other would

be one of Uncle Sam's naval vessels that patrol these waters. There are always some of them cruising about. But beggars can't be choosers and we'll have to take what we can get."

"He calls us beggars," grinned Dick, "and here we are with enough treasure to form a king's ransom."

"True enough," laughed Benton, "and about that same treasure we've got to be mighty careful. It would be exasperating now to lose it after we've run such risks in getting it. We don't want any inquisitive people asking questions or any thievish people doing something worse."

"How are we going to explain our presence on the island?" asked Tom.

"And how are we going to get the treasure off without its being noticed?" put in Dick. "It's pretty heavy stuff."

"The answer to the first question is easy enough," replied Benton. "We can say that we were shipwrecked while cruising about the Caribbean. We don't have to tell them why we were cruising there. They'll probably jump to the conclusion that it was just a pleasure trip, such as is common in these waters, and let it go at that.

"As for the second, that will take a little more planning. The jewels we can fasten in our clothing securely. The gold however is

heavier and bulkier and a different proposition. Of course it would never do to keep it in the boxes in which we brought it up. Those boxes would excite curiosity at once. We'd better make some stout boxes out of rough boards and pile a lot of our stores and belongings in them and hide the money well under everything. Then we can have those boxes taken on board of the ship that comes for us and their very roughness and commonplace appearance would prevent anyone being especially interested in them.

"Now Phil, as you're the most expert sender, suppose you get busy at the radio while the rest of us hustle around, pack up the treasure and get ready to leave."

For the next few hours they were as busy as beavers. Phil sent out his signals winging their way through space and before an hour had passed had several answers and offers of help. One especially appealed to him that came from the Americaan naval cutter Centaur doing patrol duty in those waters. She was over a hundred miles distant at the time, but the captain, after Phil from Benton's figures had given him the exact latitude and longitude of the island, promised to be on hand and take them off the following morning.

He kept his promise and the boys' hearts thrilled as the smart cutter with the Stars and

Stripes flying over it hove into view the next morning. She stopped a little way out and sent a boat under the command of an ensign to take them off. The ensign proved to be a fine upstanding young fellow of their own kind, and was most cordial and helpful. The transfer of their belongings was made without delay or difficulty, and before noon they were on their way to Jamaica, which for obvious reasons they had chosen as their first landing place instead of San Domingo, with its lurking dangers from the discomfited members of the gang of Ramirez.

They stood in a group on the after deck of the vessel that afternoon, looking back at the old pirate's island that was just sinking below the horizon.

"Well," remarked Dick, with a sigh of huge satisfaction, "it wasn't a wild goose chase after all. We got the treasure."

"And a mighty hefty one too," put in Tom. "I wonder how much it will pan out."

"Fully a hundred thousand dollars, I should say at a rough guess," replied Benton. "That'll be a pretty nice nest egg for each one of the five of us."

"It'll come in mighty handy," observed Phil. "And just think of the adventures we had in getting it. I don't suppose we'll ever have such exciting times again in all our lives."

But how far he was from the facts will be seen by those who read the next volume of this series, entitled: "The Radio Boys In the Rockies; Or, The Mystery of Lost Valley."

They landed safely in Jamaica, and then as fast as boats and trains could carry them made for home. At Bimbo's earnest entreaty, Phil agreed to take him along with them.

"The one thing this trip has taught me is that it pays to take chances," Dick remarked, as they were speeding along in the last lap of their journey. "We took big chances and got away with them."

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dreads to put it to the touch
And win or lose it all,"

quoted Steve.

"What was it pulled us through?" mused Tom. "Luck or pluck?"

"A combination of both perhaps," laughed Benton. "Not throwing any bouquets at ourselves or anything like that."

"You've left out the most important thing," said Phil. "Without it we wouldn't have found the ship. Without it we wouldn't be here now."

"What is that?" asked Dick with a puzzled air.

"Radio," answered Phil.

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